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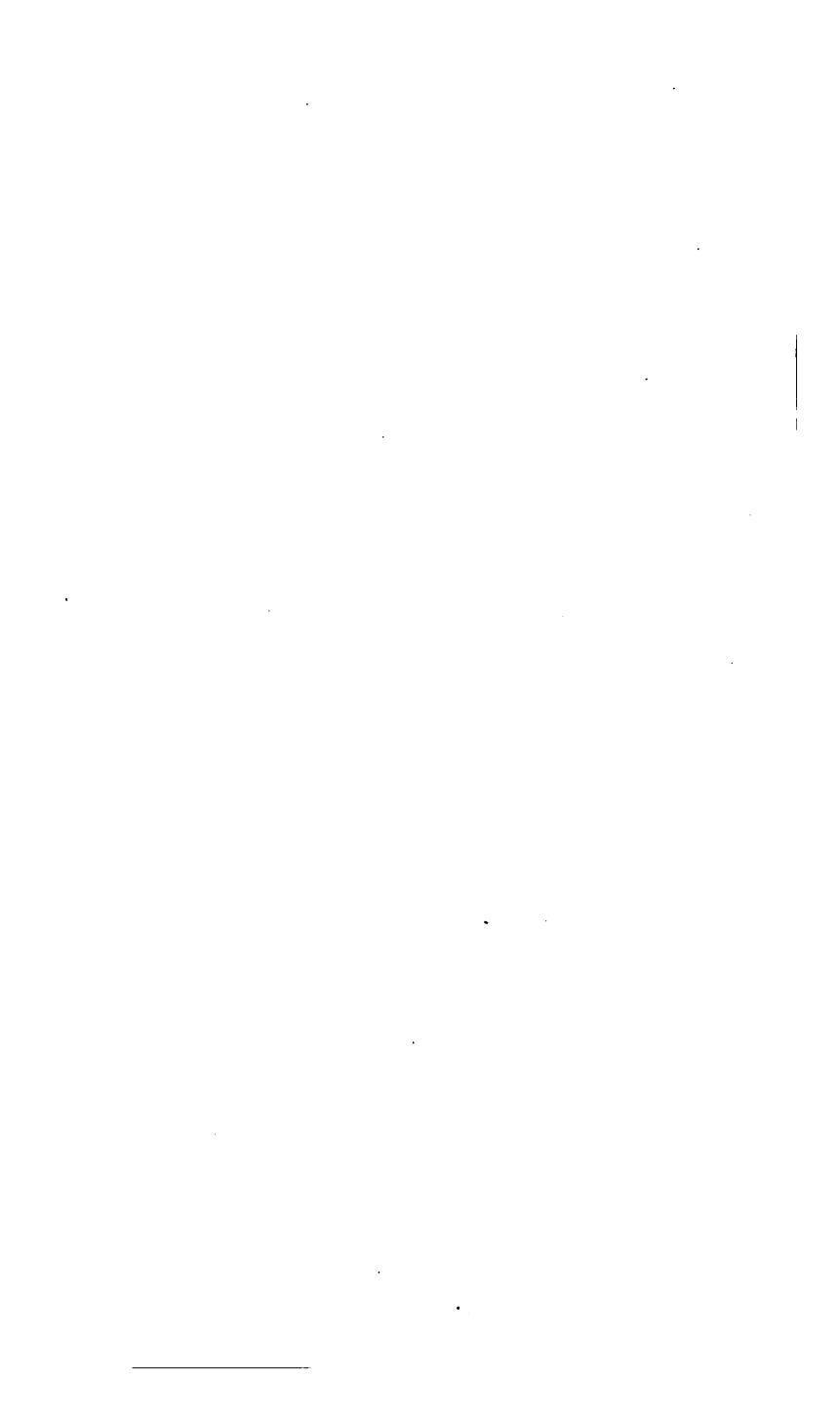
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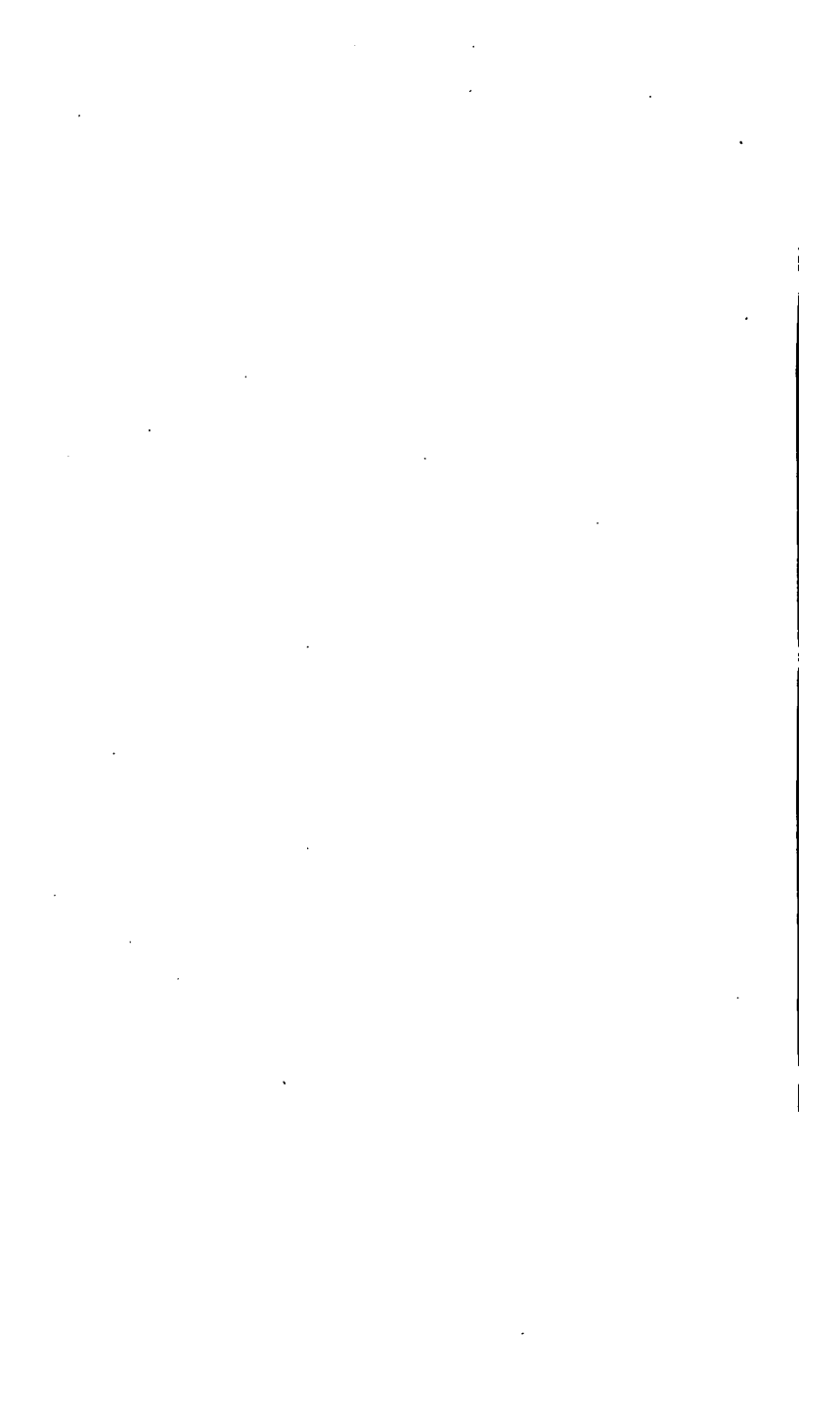
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**THE
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A PHANTOM FROM THE EAST



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THE SHIFTING OF THE FIRE

A PHANTOM FROM THE EAST

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A PHANTOM

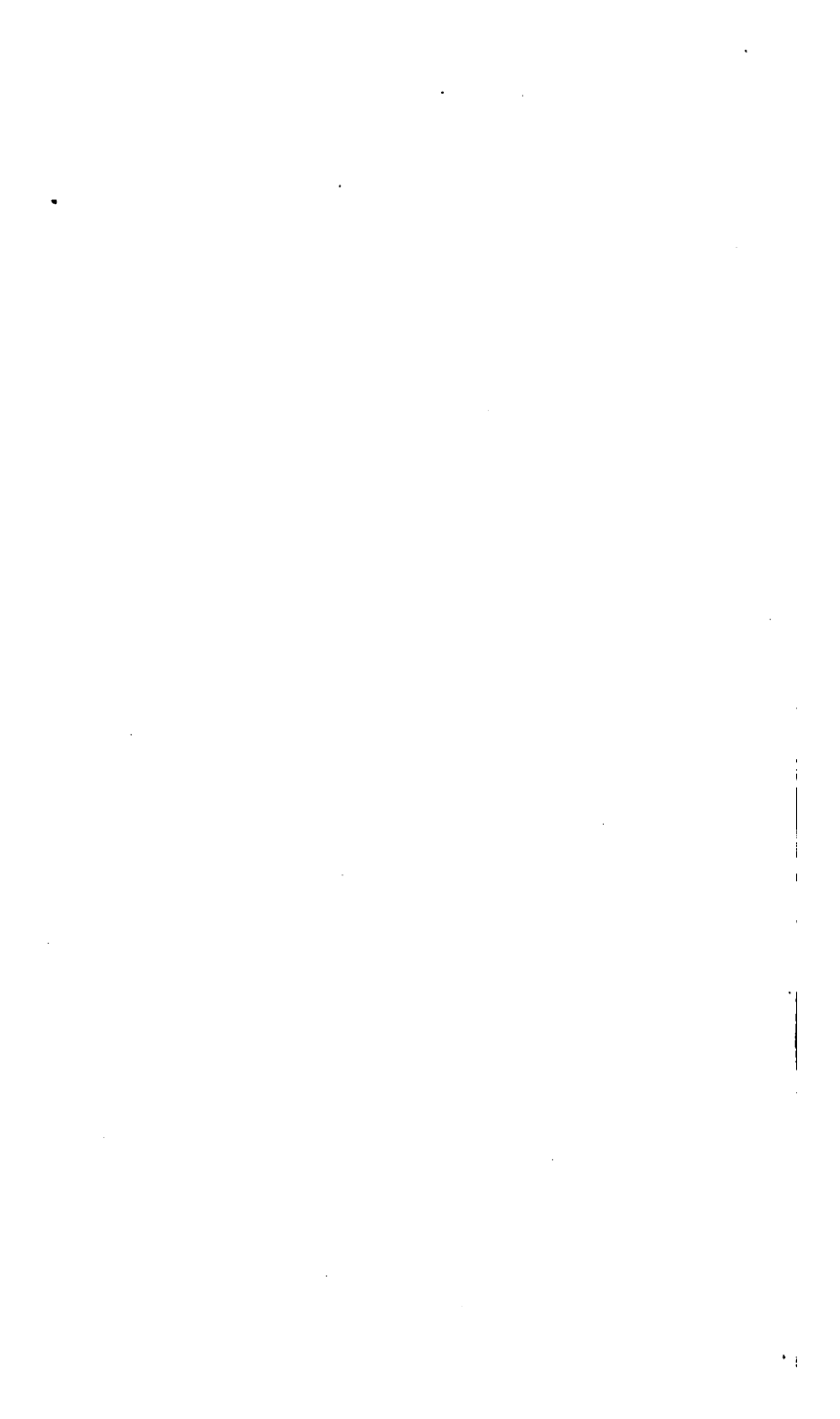
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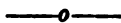
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*A Phantom
From the East.*



CHAPTER I.

SEPTEMBER 188—



MIDNIGHT, after one of those cool evenings in September, in which there is already a whisper of Autumn. Silence everywhere. In my home, where all is laid asleep, I alone am waking, my mind agitated with anxiety and expectation. Two hours ago I withdrew into my own apartments, saying that I was going to bed, like a wise man, in preparation for my early

start on the morrow. But sleep does not come. Shut into my own rooms, wandering aimlessly from one to another, I give myself up to indefinable dreams, as on the eve of the memorable departures of my sailor life on long and distant cruises; and deep down in my inner self, there passes before me, in slow and sinister review, the memories of days done with, of things for ever over, of the faces of the dead.

This time, however, I am only going away for a month, and no further than Constantinople, but the journey will be a sad one. . . .

It must be that there was played yonder some never-to-be-forgotten act of the dark fairy-tale, which has been my life, that I am so disquieted at the thought of returning thither; for

everything which comes from there, a Tartar word passing through my mind, an Oriental weapon, a piece of Turkish stuff, a perfume, to plunge me at once into a reverie, as of a banished man, in which Stamboul reappears before me. And it is by no mere artistic caprice either that my apartment here is like that of some Emir of bygone times, and resembles an Eastern dwelling, which, by witchcraft, has been transported into the midst of my dear hereditary home, with its serrated arches, its old-world embroideries of gold, and its white-washed walls. A spell, from which I shall never free myself, was thrown over me by Islam at the time when I lived on the shores of the Bosphorus, and in a thousand ways I am under that spell in things in-

animate, designs, colours, even to those ancient dream flowers painted so naïvely on the pottery on my walls. Above all, it draws me, this sad spell, towards the place where I shall be to-morrow.

It is true, then, that I shall revisit Stamboul. . . . It is really true, and quite near, this pilgrimage of which for ten years I have been dreaming. . . .

For ten years, during which the chances of my sailor life have taken me to the ends of the earth, I have never been able to return there, never once ; one might think that fate, a pitiless decree, always kept me far away. Never have I been able to keep the solemn vow to return, which, on leaving, I made to a little Circassian girl, whom I left plunged in deepest despair.

And I know nothing more about her. She was my beloved, to whom I believed I had given myself, even to my soul, for time and the infinite beyond.

But since I parted from her, I am ever haunted in my sleep by this vision which is always the same. My ship puts into Stamboul, a hurried, stolen visit;—this Stamboul which I see in my dreams is strange to me, bigger, distorted, sinister;—in haste I land in a fever to get to her, and a thousand things prevent me, and my anxiety increases as the time goes by; then, all at once, comes the moment to set sail again, and I have to depart without having seen her or even found her lost traces, and my pain is so keen that it awakens me. . . .

With a sinking heart, I take up,

wishing to read it again during these waiting hours, a book which I once published, feeling even then the craving to celebrate my suffering, to cry it aloud in the ears of the passers-by, and which, since the day it appeared, I have never dared to open. Poor little book, clumsily put together I believe, but into which I put my whole soul of those days, beaten and struggling in the first grip of the delirium of life. I had no idea then, that I should continue to write, and that the world would learn later who was the anonymous author of *Aziyadé*. (*Aziyadé*, a Turkish woman's name, invented by me to replace the real one, which was prettier and softer-sounding, but which I did not want to tell to the world.)

Devoutly, as though I were lifting the

stone, and gazing into a tomb, I began to turn these forgotten pages, astonishing even to me who wrote them.

First of all puerilities which make me smile. A certain conventional Loti, whom I thought I resembled, and then here and there heroics and blasphemies; the first mere common-place repetitions that move my pity; the others so despairing and so ardent, they seemed like prayers. Ah, those young days when I could blaspheme and pray!

But all that which is unsaid, which was sleeping between the lines, between the impotent dull words, wakes up bit by bit, and comes to me out of the long night into which I had let it fade. They reappear before me, those unfathomable *under-currents* of my life, of my love of that time, without which,

after all, there would have been no profound charm or heartfelt suffering. From time to time the remembrance, the suffering which this book evokes, gives me a sort of icy shock or shudder of the soul, such as comes from looking into a yawning abyss, or drawing near to some great mystery—mysteries of pre-existence, or of something which cannot even be put vaguely into words. Why does the impression which returns to me suddenly of a ray of the May moon, shining upon that stony country of Salonica, where our history began, make me shudder? Or the remembrance of the sun on a winter evening shining into our hidden retreat at Eyoub? Or even a phrase spoken by her, and which returns to me with the intonations of the Turkish language, and the sound of her grave young voice. Or

simply the shadow of that great desolate wall, throwing upon a corner of the solitary street the oppression of the mosque near by. To what, in the unknown depths of the human soul, are these things linked—things so slight, so fugitive, scarce real? What attachments do they find in what has gone before? What dead and gone adventures, and still suffering dust, that they have power so to make us tremble? And above all, why do we only feel these strange shocks of remembrance when it is a question of the country, place, or time when love touched us with his wand of sweet and deadly magic?

I turn over many of the leaves without even glancing at them, those which I had arranged, changing the facts more or less maladroitly for the needs

of the book, or better to baffle indiscreet research. Then come our last days at Eyoub, with the heart-break of the parting, while the Spring was coming back again once more to ancient Stamboul, scattering its gloomy streets with the white blossoms of the almond trees. And now, here is the end, all that imaginary passage about Azraël which I added, not only because it seemed to me with my then ideas about writing stories that a *dénouement* was necessary, but much more because it had been my ardent dream that that should be our ending. Ah! I remember I wrote it with my tears and blood, and although it is pure invention, it was so nearly being true, that I re-read it this evening, after so many years, with a trouble which I did not expect; somewhat as we shall

after death read the last page of the journal of our life.

Well! the real ending remains a mystery still, and I tremble to think that soon I shall know it, that I set out to-morrow to stir up all those ashes yonder.

As for the real sequel, here are the simple facts:

No; I know nothing more about her. I have nothing upon which to ground the conviction, at once sweet and infinitely greivous, that I have of her death. Little by little our love story came to an end, but without any precise solution: our life together remains a story without an end.

The rare little letters which reached me at first in spite of the fierce watch kept over her, and through a thousand

difficulties, have ceased for nearly seven years to bring me their smothered lament. *Achmet's* letters also have ceased, and that, too, in a manner that alarmed me. First they became peculiar, improbable, confusing names and persons in a way that he would never have done, and persisting in never mentioning Aziyadé's name to me—so much so that I dared no longer ask questions, or reply to them even, for fear of traps set by strange hands to intercept our secrets.

And how was it possible at a distance to read this riddle; what friend had I devoted enough, clever and faithful enough to be entrusted to make such enquiries at Stamboul, behind the harem's gratings? . . . From year to year also I hoped to return, and, on the contrary, the chances of my life had led me else-

where—to Africa, to China, always further away . . . Then by degrees a sort of calm came over these memories, without its being my fault exactly; they became colourless as though seen through dust or funeral ashes.

Only in the night, during the lucid intervals of my dream, and in a fashion which was always the same, my regrets returned to me undiminished; always those imaginary returns to a Stamboul, whose domes, too high and too dark, are outlined against a dead sky; always the same anxious journeyings, delayed in spite of me by insurmountable lethargy, always abortive; and to end it up always the same awakening at the supposed hour of departure, with the agony and remorse of having wasted the rare moments

which should have sufficed to bring me to her feet.

Oh, that strange Stamboul, the oppressive spectral town which I have seen in my dreams! Sometimes it was a long way off, only just its outline to be seen on the horizon; I would land upon some desert shore in the twilight, seeing in the distance its minarets and domes. Heavy with sleep I would make my way across great melancholy wastes full of graves; or perhaps it was marsh lands and the rushes, irises, all sorts of water plants would delay my steps, knotting themselves about me and weaving shackles for my feet. And the hour would go by, and I could not advance.

At other times, the ship of my dream would carry me to the very walls of the holy city. Then it was

in the streets that I had to endure the anguish of not arriving; in their gloomy, empty labyrinths I would fly first towards that high quarter of Mahmed-Fatih, where her old master used to live; then remembering on the way that I could not go direct to her, I would hesitate, in a fever of impatience while the minutes flew by, not knowing any more what road to take to find at least some one whom I had known in the old times, who could talk to me about her, and be able to tell me if she was still alive, and what had become of her—or if she were dead in which cemetery they had buried her. And time would be lost in indecision, in meeting with spectral people who would bar my passage. At other times, I would waste my precious minutes on trifles,

loitering as in my walks in the old days, at the armourers' bazaars, seating myself in *cafés* to wait for people whom I had sent for, and who never arrived. Or, again, I would lose myself, with secret terror, in unknown deserted parts of the town, in streets which grew narrower and narrower, imprisoning me like a trap, in the midst of a dark night, and to end it all the hour would arrive, the inexorable hour of departure, with its increased anxiety causing me to awake. But never, never in this dream which possesses me, and which, during these ten years, has returned to me so often, which comes back from week to week, have I once caught a glimpse of her young face, not even disfigured or dead; never have I obtained even from a phantom, an

indication, however confused, of her fate.

And now, the spell which kept me away for so long, seems at last to be broken. In absolute possession of my activity of mind and life, I am going to see again, in the full light of day, that town which to me has by degrees become so mixed up with my terrible dream, that it seems to be itself almost a phantom of my brain. I can hardly believe that nothing will come to impede me; that I shall accomplish my design; that I shall walk through those streets without being retarded by overpowering sleep; that I shall interrogate living beings, and that, perhaps, I shall recover the lost trace of my beloved.

I really and truly do start to-morrow,

and start in as common-place and actual a fashion as for any ordinary voyage; my trunks are below, ready to be carried away in the morning in the carriage which will take me to the station. Prompt as I have been all my life, I shall cross Europe very rapidly, in three days by the express from Paris to Bucharest. On the way however, in the Carpathians, I shall stop a week in the palace of an unknown queen;—a halt which will doubtless be somewhat akin to the world of dreams and enchantment, before the final agitating stage is reached. And then from Varna by the Black Sea in twenty-four hours I shall reach Constantinople.

As I happen to have finished beforehand my preparations for de-

parture, there is nothing to disturb the peace of my night vigil in the silence and sleep around me.

I gather together all the small and most precious objects which I shall carry about me ; letters, amulets, and a certain ring which she gave me. Then solemnly I open a secret drawer, hidden under old Oriental embroideries. It is the grave in which sleep a thousand small mementoes brought from Eyoub, sheets of paper upon which a few Turkish words are awkwardly traced in her childish hand ; some pieces cut from the stuff of our Broussa divan ; ghosts of poor flowers which once in the spring-time grew in the gardens of Stamboul. From the depths of this hiding-place under this *débris*, I seek for an address in Arab characters, which, on the morn-

ing of my departure, was dictated by Achmet to the public writer in the square of Jeni-Djami. According to him, it would be my last resource for finding him, should I not return for many years, and when my other means of corresponding with them, the envelopes directed to him on the eve of my departure at Aziyadé's dictation should have been exhausted.

Here it is—this address; it takes up five or six lines, it is endless; it gives the name and direction of an old Armenian woman, "Anaktar-Chiraz, who lives in the suburb of Kassim-Pacha, in a little low house in the square of Hadji-Ali. Beside her lives a fruit-seller, and opposite, an old man who sells turbans."

Achmet thought that this woman would certainly never leave her house,

because it was her own. She had once taken Achmet in and nursed him through some illness in his orphaned childhood. She loved him dearly he told me, and would always know where to find him, even if he changed his trade and lodgings twenty times. Poor little *naïve* address, written, I remember in the open air in the shadow of the mosque, under the plantains, in the bright, young spring sunshine, and which has slept for more than ten years in the obscurity of this drawer, while I was travelling about. It has grown yellow, faded; has the air of an ancient document telling of the dead. It pains me to see it so faded. It seems such a fantastic idea that I can take it back to the gaudy Eastern day, that the words written

there will ever serve me to take up again a clue towards creatures still living and real, and not myths of my imagination, phantoms of my memory. That old Armenian woman, the fruit-seller, the vendor of turbans, the poor folk in an obscure suburb, and that mean ancient quarter, where I recall vaguely having been once or twice to sit in the sunlight with Achmet, under the aged vine arbour, in the sad little garden of a Turkish *café*,—who knows what may have become of all that, who knows what I may find there. . . .

Ten years ago, it is a long way back, where all the images are blurred by the same mist. Besides, at first, my reverie touched upon anxieties still deadened, and a melancholy that had become calm. But now a greater agi-

tation takes hold of me at the sudden thought: perhaps she is still alive! For a long time that thought had not struck home to me in so poignant a manner. In fact, as I know nothing, am sure of nothing, it is not impossible that soon, in so few days that I tremble as though it might be to-morrow, I may find myself in her presence. Ah! once again to meet her gaze, which I had schooled myself to think dead, her look of sadness or her smiles; to meet once more her eyes, as she said, "face to face!" Oh, the agony or the intoxication of that moment! . . .

And what will she be like, I wonder; what will her face look like at twenty-eight? Will she appear to me in all her womanly beauty, my little girl of the old days, slender of form,

with her sea-green eyes? or will she be faded. Who knows, perhaps having done for ever with things of the flesh, and of love? It does not matter, anyhow, even aged and dying, I love her still. But, in any case, the moment of this strange meeting will be rather terrible for both of us, having no possible to-morrow, no sequel which could be faced without terror. Aziyadé and Loti, of the past, at least, are dead; whatever remains of them is transformed, hardly bears any resemblance to them, doubtless, in face or in soul; as this childish little book, which I am just closing, tells us, both are dead.

It is almost sacrilegious to say so, but, at this moment, I believe I should be rather glad to be sure of finding only a tomb yonder. For her sake

and for mine, I should prefer her to have preceded me into that final dust which neither thinks nor suffers. And then, I shall go and keep my vow to return, before one of those small grave-stones with its mystical, confiding inscriptions, which endure so quietly through the ages in the cypress woods. . . .

The air in my rooms is heavy to-night, and my mind is troubled. Everything around me looks melancholy in the light of the single candle, which leaves the corners in deep obscurity; here and there flashes a steel edge, the curved blade of a yataghan, and upon the deep red of the wall-hangings, the strange embroideries seem to be the symbols of Eastern mysteries which I shall never understand. What strange beings of a by-

gone time have in these designs given form to their dreams, their unutterable dreams? Those for whom these weapons were tempered, these golden threads woven, what were their illusions, their loves, their hopes? I feel them further away from me than ever, those believers who are now sleeping in consecrated earth under the shadow of the white mosques. All this decoration from the ancient East serves this evening to bring home to me how unlike, even to their souls, are the different races of men, and the madness, the impossibility, the fatality of seeking for love there in the East. Between two such lost ones who love one another, there always remain the barriers of heredity, fundamentally different education, and the abyss of things which are not to be under-

stood. And they must see that afterwards, when their end draws near, they will not be able to comfort themselves at their last hour with the common memory, still sweet, of the religious teaching of their childhood; nor will the same earth reunite them hereafter.

It would seem thus, that time and death separate them still more, and that not even the nothingness into which they will be dissolved will be the same. . . .

Things here are as impregnated with Turkish odours, as in a seraglio, and it is unbearable; this silence too is heavy, added to the heaviness of the perfumed air,—and I open wide all the windows. . . .

The silence remains the same, or

rather seems to be augmented and prolonged by the silence all around. Through the open windows a moth flutters in with the long moonbeams, and there comes a freshness, an exquisite freshness, from the gardens, from the country, and the great marshes, even further away still, from the young elms on the ramparts. The fresh air seems to have awakened me as from a depressing dream, and I lean out of the window to inhale its life-giving breath. From there I can see all the familiar things in their well-known surroundings; the moonlight gives them, to-night, a sort of tranquil immobility and an unreal air; but they are real, nevertheless, and all my life I have seen those old roofs, those walls, those deep hollows in the garden, those shadowy

masses of verdure, and you would say that it was all singing me a melancholy little hymn in praise of my native country, advising me not to leave it. So many others, more simple than I, have never quitted this country or even the neighbourhood,—perhaps if I had done as they have. . . .

A scent comes up from the garden, a scent of dampness, of moss, and of dead leaves, which is peculiar to the first chill evenings when light mists arise. Autumn already! Another summer going from us; it will be past when I return from Stamboul. Alas! for this journey, I am going to miss our last fine days here with the loveliest bloom of our roses on the walls, and I shall not see again this year two dear, black-robed figures walking up

and down in the courtyard in the glory of the late September. And who can tell with all the unforeseen chances of my sailor life when I shall see all this again? Here I am now, undecided, saddened, and on the very eve of my departure, almost held back by regrets for what I am leaving behind me.

Then, abruptly, a change comes over me as soon as I return to my dark red Turkish room, with its glittering weapons; everything is forgotten in the impatient yearning for Stamboul, simply because of an amulet which I take out of a box and hang round my neck.

I had not looked at it for a long time, this Oriental amulet; it consists of, I know not what tiny mysterious objects enclosed in a bag, the bag

sewn rather awkwardly by small, unskilful hands, which took great pains, however, is made of a piece of cloth of gold, upon which a pink flower is brocaded; and this bit of stuff was chosen and cut out of what remained freshest of a certain small vest which a Circassian child had worn for two years of her life to go to school in by the paths through the tall grasses, beside the Bosphorus, in the village of Kanlidja. I believe it is as old as the world, this sad nonsense which consists in exchanging with the beloved one poor little trifles belonging to the time of one's first existence, and making of them amulets against mutual forgetfulness. I have seen it many times amongst beings of very different races. And this agreement of human feeling, alas! makes me

doubt again of the actual individuality of souls: when one thinks of it, one is tempted, so much do they seem alike, only to look upon them as ephemeral emanations of that great impersonality which is the race indefinitely renewed.

It is the same with all of us; when love grows great and aspires to immortality, or when friendship becomes deep enough to make us fear that it should end, we begin to look back along the past to the childhood of those we love. The present seems to be insufficient and too short; then, as we know that perhaps there will *never be a future*, we try to take possession of the past, which, at least, *has been*. "Whom did you resemble when you were quite a small girl? Tell me what was your face like,

your dress? Of what did you dream when you were quite a little boy? What was your life, your games? And I also, I wish to tell you of my childish joys, and my first sorrows. I will even make you a present of this small object which belongs to that time, and which was very precious to me."

At Eyoub, in the mystery full of danger of our Turkish retreat, shut up together, afraid of the least noise which disturbed the heavy silence without, we often passed our winter evenings in talk of this description. And many times in my life—before I knew her, and after I had almost forgotten her—many times I have done the same, alas! with others, under the sweet influence of friendship, or the deadly charm

of love. . . Oh, what a pitiful snare it all is!

And, yet, perhaps a man to whom a lovely young girl has been moved to give a charm against forgetfulness, making it so lovingly from the dearest relics of her childhood, has drunk the best part of the cup of life, and may be well content to die.

This talisman of cloth of gold has besides to-night produced its magic effect, for see how strangely it has completed its evocation begun by the reading of the book. All at once she who gave me the amulet is before my eyes; I see her tying it round my neck, and then raising her eyes to mine with a look in which was her whole soul, so simple and so grave. Her face has come out of the night with the expression it wore during

those last days, and the supreme questioning of her eyes. . . . And then whatever may have seemed just nor a little artificial, perhaps, the hesitancy in my feeling for her, has rolled away like a cloud, with all that I said to myself which was reasonable and cold, egotistical and horrible about the probability of her death. Oh, no, instead of that tomb, let me find her, no matter how or at what cost, even if I have to begin to suffer again afterwards, I would rather look upon her once more; I dare not hope for it, but I feel that I wish for it at all risks.

Ah! to find her, even aged, even near to death, a shadow still able to think and to understand that I had returned and was asking for pardon; a shadow which will still have those eyes and the expression which I

remember in them, and whom I may love for an instant with the best part of my soul and my most tender pity. Or even, if it must be so, let me find her, having forgotten me, young, still beautiful, and enjoying in peace the summer of her life, the few years of sunshine which belonged to her as they do to every creature, and which I have not the right to take from her.

Those barriers of which I spoke, those stupendous differences of race and religion, do they exist? I no longer know. Love overcomes everything, the charm of a look which goes from the bottom of one soul to the bottom of another. And at this moment if she were near here, I should go and take her by the hand, and without any hesitation, with a smile, I should lead her into the midst

of all that I hold most dear, and which I most respect.

All my changing impressions of this evening are lost at present in this tender desire to see her, in this yearning—hopeless, as I fear it is—towards her.





CHAPTER II.

BUCHAREST, *October 188* .



ABOUT a fortnight later, here I am at the other end of Europe, in a great Royal Palace, where I arrived at night, and where I am alone.

After travelling very quickly through Germany and Austria, I halted for a week with the charming Queen of this country in her summer palace among the Carpathians.

I left her yesterday, and here at Bucharest where I am to pass the night, the hospitality of the royal palace, at present uninhabited, is offered me.

There is nothing so desolate and sadly solemn as an empty palace. As soon as I am alone in my apartments, a strange sort of silence envelopes me. From far away the noise of carriages, more incessant at Bucharest than in Paris, reaches me like the muffled rumbling of a storm; I am separated from the lively street by great unfrequented squares, in which sentinels keep watch, and in the palace itself nothing stirs.

In the *château* of the queen I had allowed myself to be charmed and distracted by a thousand things. But this is my last halting-place before Stamboul, which is not more than twenty-four hours distant, and all night I hear resounding upon the pavement, more and more distinctly, in a sort of *crescendo*, the

regular tramp of the sentinels who guard the gates.

Tuesday, October 5.

I leave the palace at four o'clock in the morning, before daybreak. It is very cold in the streets of Bucharest. A landau takes me full speed to the station, through a stream of carriages which roll along in the darkness. The sky reflects the icy tones of winter. All along these straight new streets, which resemble those of some European capital, I no longer know where I am, or where these horses are carrying me so quickly; in any case, I no longer realise very clearly that I am on the road to Stamboul, and that I shall reach it to-morrow.

At five o'clock in the morning,

I am in the train, in the heavy sleeping cars of the Orient express.

Then towards eight o'clock, the train stops beside the Danube which we have to cross by boat. It is still very cold, with a light mist on the horizon of the endless flat plain. But here there are already some Oriental costumes, our boatmen wear the fez, and upon the river, the motionless barges along its banks carry the Turkish flag—red with a white crescent. At this sight, my emotion becomes all at once more poignant, when I think of the end towards which I am travelling, on this cool October morning, across these streams and plains.

On the other bank we get into a

wretched little train which is to take us across Bulgaria.

She looks very sad and savage on this autumn day—this Bulgaria in revolt and at war.

A long stoppage at noon at some village unknown to me, in the midst of a barren plain. There is an encampment of cavalry there. The soldiers are equipped for active service, their bearing resolute and proud, ready to fight to-morrow. Their band draws up in a circle to play to us, a strange, wild, sad Oriental air, something like a march, slow and resolute towards an end which will be death. . . . And in listening to them I could almost weep. . . . My approach to Stamboul give an ever-increasing and exaggerated importance to everything on the road, changes

their aspect, and seems to present them to me as if I saw them through crape.

As we draw near to the Black Sea the air becomes less cold, and the stations, in poor villages, at long intervals, lost in the midst of desolate regions, begin to have Tartar names which I can understand and translate, and which charm me as though it were my own country I were returning to. *The Little Market, The Little Devil*, etc. . . . Turkish costumes, turbans, jackets of felt, braided with black, begin to be seen along the line, and I listen eagerly to hear these people speak the beloved language of this rough melancholy country.

At last we reach Varna, and I salute the first minarets and mosques.

The Black Sea is calm when we go on board the barge which is to take us to the Constantinople steamer. The air has become warm and soft, and as Varna disappears behind us, its minarets are bathed in the golden light of the setting sun.

A noisy *table d'hôte* on the steamer full of tourists, and, for me, momentary forgetfulness in this babel of voices, and the commonplaces of the conversation.

But afterwards, when I go up for a solitary walk in the grey night, on the bridge of the steamer, which glides along towards the south, very quickly, without tossing, without noise, as though it were sliding—then I remember that I am quite near my destination, and that I shall arrive there to-morrow. It seems

strange to me, so used to my profession, to be on board this boat with no watch to keep, in the midst of sailors who would not obey me, and to whom I am unknown; it is none of my business, neither the working of the vessel, nor our route, and that seems to me a little unreal. It throws in this obscure night, a kind of dreamy uncertainty over the reality of my presence on board. No one here knows my name, much less what I am going to do yonder, and how troubled is my spirit as we draw near to the end of our voyage. My return to Stamboul now assumes an air of mystery and sadness, in the silence becoming more and more absolute, on the vessel which is sleeping as it speeds upon its way.


Instinctively my eyes watch and follow the movements of two or three small lights, far away in the distance, hardly perceptible, which seem to be mere dots in the immense space around us—in the sky or on the sea, I cannot tell—and which are the lighthouses on the Turkish coast. The sea becomes more and more calm, and our pace more gliding, in the obscure night in which the horizon has no outline.

In my dream my imaginary returns are just like this one ; I glide along very swiftly in the obscurity towards Stamboul, and this evening I end almost by thinking that I am but a phantom myself, revisiting by night the land that I have loved. . . .



CHAPTER III.

Thursday, October 6.

T dawn, an official, in a strange tongue comes to warn the passengers in their cabins that we are just entering the Bosphorus. I had only just fallen asleep—having spent the night in dreaming—and I awake with a start, my heart in a tumult at the mere word Bosphorus.

On the bridge, where it is cold, the passengers appear, one by one, indifferent and rather disappointed with what is shown to them. Certainly, the entrance to the Bosphorus is somewhat dull, down between those

mountains obscurely outlined in gloomy colours. It is the dawn of an autumn day, grey and misty under an unchanging, low sky. We shall see hardly anything through these banks of mist, which hang down like a veil.

It is very disappointing for these tourists; the effect of the arrival will be missed. As for me, I shall have but two days and a half—only two days and a half—for my pilgrimage; and I reflect that, if the winter sets in already, if it rains, as is probable, everything will be sadder, more complicated for me, and my researches more difficult.

Last night I did not see the third-class passengers, who now crowd on the bridge—real Turks these, the men in caftans, the women veiled. Then, all of a sudden, as we approach

the land, there comes to us a penetrating, peculiar scent, exquisite to my senses—a scent once so well-known and long forgotten—the scent of the Turkish earth, something which comes from the plants or from the people, I do not know, but which has not changed, and which, in an instant, brings back to me a world of bygone impressions. Suddenly, those ten years seem to drop out of my life, with all that has happened in them since that day of agony when I quitted Stamboul, and I find myself again in Turkey—even before I have put foot into it—as though a part of my soul, which had never left it, had come to re-take possession of my irresponsible, wandering body. . .

We begin to descend the Bos-

phorus, and the transformation scene on either bank slowly unrolls itself before us. I recognise everything, the palaces, the tiniest villages, the smallest cluster of trees; but I am so calm at present, that I am surprised, and cannot understand myself—one would think that I had hardly been away a day from Turkey. I am just a little anxious as we pass by those cemeteries, in which, quite close to the water, there are the graves of women under the gigantic cypresses, with their grey trunks and black foliage. I look steadfastly at these graves, stone on top, always surmounted with a kind of symmetrical coping representing flowers. Sometimes I turn round, with a vague uneasiness, to follow with my eyes, as it disappears, one of these

tombs, blue or green, with its inscription in gold. I have always imagined to myself that her tomb would be like that. But who knows what unknown form lies sleeping under it?

Here are already the imperial kiosks and the grand harems; then the rows of white palaces with marble landing steps. And, at last, above and below appears all at once out of the mist which is torn asunder, the incomparable outline of Stamboul.

Ah! this is Stamboul, quite real and drawing very near now in the clear light of day, restored to its ordinary aspect, which ten years of dreaming had somewhat changed, almost as beautiful as was my remembrance of it. And I am astonished to find that I become more and more

calm in spirit, even talking with the fellow travellers whom chance has thrown in my way, and pointing out to them, like a guide, the palaces and mosques.

The roadstead is noisy in the midst of the confusion of steamers and sailing vessels, carrying all the flags of Europe. The furious invasion of boatmen, custom-house officials and porters begins at once. A hundred skiffs take us by assault, and all these people who flood the decks talk and shout in every language of the Levant. Ah! how well I know it, this hubbub of arrival, these voices, these intonations, these faces; and the mass of vessels about us, and the black smoke—above which in the distance, against the clear sky, rise the domes of the holy mosques! I take

part in all this racket, and Turkish words, even the most forgotten of them, come back to me all at once. With the boatmen about my passage, with the bearers about my luggage, I discuss questions to which I am absolutely indifferent, for the excitement of it, and also to be able to talk. Even until I reach the boat where I am at last installed with my baggage, I keep up all sorts of astonishing bargainings—and so, almost without emotion—except, perhaps, for a certain tremor as my foot touches it—I find myself on land, on the quay at Constantinople.

After more than an hour lost over the formalities of the custom house, passport, and what not, upon the quay, in the low-lying quarter of

Galata, always full of the same strange clatter and clamour, here I am at last at Pera, installed in the most respectable hotel of the place, crowded with tourists. It is nearly ten o'clock; what a waste of time, when my every minute ought to be counted!

And yet I must have some food, open my trunks, dress . . . and time continues to fly.

The room in which I dress is ordinary, perched up high, its windows overlooking a collection of very common-place European houses; but above these roofs there are two or three marvellous little glimpses over Stamboul and Scutari—domes, minarets, cypresses, which appear as though suspended in air. And these things as yet hardly seen, suffice to recall

with a tender emotion and feverish haste the consciousness of my surroundings. Who knows what I shall have heard by this evening! Perhaps, alas! nothing. In two days to seek in this great mysterious Stamboul the trace, lost for seven or eight years, of a woman of the harem, how mad I am! I shall never succeed, never find it.

My plan, long debated, is first of all to seek out the old Armenian woman of the Kassim-Pacha suburb mentioned by Achmet as an unfailing resource, and whose complicated address I found on the night of my departure. If she is living, perhaps, she will be able to give me the key to the whole thing; that would be the simplest and quickest method. I am now waiting for an interpre-

ter, whom they promised to send me,—for I shall need, for my inquiry, some one who can read Turkish, as I can only speak it. He is coming, he is coming, they tell me with exasperating calmness, and time passes, and he does not come.

Then I decide to go down again to Galata and find another whom they have told me of.

He is not at home, that one. . . . I rush back to the hotel. It is already half-past twelve! Good Heavens, how much time lost, when I have only two days! It is like my dream, everything hinders me! . . .

At last, here is the interpreter, a horrible old Greek, sly, ferret-like, who is ready to follow me all to-day and all to-morrow. To prove him, I give him the old woman's address'

which he reads off fluently; he knows the place quite well, Hadji-Ali where she lives, and will take me there at once, as time presses.

We shall go quicker on foot he says, and save time by short cuts he knows of, through streets that neither horses nor carriages could pass through. And at last here we are on the way. The clouds of this morning have disappeared from the sky. Thank God, the day is almost summer-like, warm and bright, it will make things seem less sinister. I carry in my hand old Anaktar-Chiraz's address, the precious little guiding scrawl upon which my whole plan depends, and which sees again, after ten years, its Oriental sunshine. I walk along with a rapid stride, in a fever to arrive, with the physical feeling of having become

lighter and lighter, of gliding along so to speak, without touching the earth, a great contrast to the lethargy of sleep which all these years used to fetter me so heavily in my dreams ; my blood flows more swiftly than its wont, I seem to hear it surging in my head. I would run, if it were not for my old guide who follows me, and whom I drag along like a chain.

Where is he taking me? I hope he has understood. They are quite new to me these quarters, in which I recognise nothing. Everything is changed, and frightfully built over since I left,—and this utter transformation of places does but impress upon me, yet more painfully, the feeling that my youth and my love story are swallowed up in the past, in the dust, and that my effort to

find buried traces will be all in vain. . . .

Ah ! here are the old Turkish quarters at last, — small, winding alleys where I begin to find myself more at home. . . . We descend into a lower level, which was very familiar to me once . . . and behind this turning, down there, there should be an ancient monastery of howling dervishes, a melancholy place with its catafalques, which one can see behind its grated windows, terrifying when one passed it at night. . . . Yes, there it is still ; without slackening my pace, I glance between the barred windows ; always the same old coffins, covered with the same old shawls, and with the same old turbans, the whole scarcely more mouldered with damp and worms than in the old days. It

is strange, but these death-trappings, because they have remained just as they were, revive in me only memories of the spring-time and of love.

Things are becoming more and more familiar to me. We must be drawing near to Anaktar-Chiraz's home now, for I recognise a certain small mosque whose dome, sunken with age, rises all white-washed between the black cypresses—and I can even see the *café*, with its century old vine, where Achmet one evening presented me to the old woman. I have therefore, reached the first stage of my pilgrimage, and I regain a little confidence, a little hope of reaching my goal.

Knowing the mistrust which a stranger inspires, I go and sit by myself in the dismal garden of the little *café*

under the yellow vines, beside the old wall where I used to sit before; I will call for a narghileh like a native, while the old Greek goes right and left trying to pick up information.

He comes back discouraged; I must have made some mistake, he says, or my paper is wrong; nobody in the neighbourhood knows anything about it. . .

But I am quite certain however that it was very near here, for she came from her own home, this woman, when one evening Achmet called her to introduce her to me, and beg her to receive for him the letters which I should write from my "Frankish Country." . . . If she is dead, it is impossible that somebody at least should not remember her. Well, then,

let him return and question the old people of the quarter; he must insist, in spite of their gloomy looks and closed lips, and I will double the recompense which I had promised him.

A quarter-of-an-hour's weary waiting, and then he returns, triumphantly waving a bit of pencilled paper. An old Jew who knew her very well, had written down for money her new address. She is not dead, but she moved three years ago to go and live a long way from here, at Pri-Pacha, in the extreme outskirts, near the great Jewish cemeteries.

Alas, what a lot of time it will take to get there! and yet I have a trace, an almost sure trail to which I would rather cling than try anything else more difficult or more uncertain. Quick, let

them find me, I don't care where, two saddle horses, and let us start.

Ah! that journey on horseback to Pri-Pacha, where can I find words to express the melancholy of it, on that calm, clear autumn day, under the still warm sun, already wearing the dying splendour which tells of a summer near its close. . . .

We make our way straight along the Gulf of the Golden Horn, but on the opposite side to Stamboul, and rather far from the sea, in the mournful country round the suburbs of the waterside.

As though it were fated, we have to pass by all the places formerly so familiar to me, which I used to pass in the winter mornings when I lived at Eyoub, the gloomy frosty mornings of February or March, returning to

my ship after those nights of rapture. These are the places, too, that for ten years I have seen most often in my nightly visions; in this day-dream they are more distinct, but they seem scarce more real to me.

We hurry on, putting our horses to the trot whenever it is possible. Sometimes we descend into bogs, sometimes mount up to the heights, always rather desolate and barren of soil, from whence we can see below on the other side, the wonderful spectacle of Stamboul, golden in the sunshine.

Over and above my own sadness, which show me to-day living things under their aspect of death, what other sadness is it which dwells ever here, and broods over these outskirts of Constantinople. . . . I have tried to express it in one of my first books,

but could not do it, and to-day, every stone, every grave which I recognise on my way, brings back the unutterable impression of the past, with that internal agony, one of the most constant feelings of my life, the impotence to paint, and to put into words what I feel and what I suffer.

Everywhere, on the earth, on the rocks, on the short grass, there is a uniform russet colour, like the rust of time; one might think that the country was covered with ashes, over which too many races, too many civilisations have passed, and which has been exhausted with too many glories. And from time to time, in the midst of these abandoned wastes, one catches a glimpse of some white minaret surrounded with black cypresses.

A deeper ravine opens in front of us, into which we have to descend; in appearance it is as rough and wild as though we were a hundred leagues from a town. Quite at the bottom, under some palm trees, is an antique fountain, where once I used to meet, almost every morning, the same young Turkish woman, who seemed to be very beautiful through her veil. I used to pass the spot before sunrise in the winter dawn, and at the same hour she would come alone to fill her copper pitcher at this fountain. As we passed each other in the narrow path, full of morning mist, we would exchange a friendly look, after which she would turn away her eyes, which were alone visible under her veil, with a half smile.

I have never thought of her again in all those ten years, and now I see her as it were in a clear mirror, and all the sad impressions of those dawns return upon me, and those walks along the still deserted roads, my face lashed with the dry, frosty air, or the grey mist around me. And as I was very troubled in my mind at that time, I used to ask myself every morning, whether, with such danger all around us, the coming night would see me re-united to her whom I had just left, or whether before the evening, Azraël would not pass by and destroy it all.

At Pri-Pacha, where we arrive at last by questioning the passers-by, we find out the little house of the old Armenian woman upon whom

depends the whole result of my pilgrimage, and I am anxious as I knock at the door. Twice, three times the ancient knocker resounds loudly, making the worm-eaten boards tremble; no one comes to open the door, and the windows also remain closed. But a poor old Jew, who looks at least a hundred, comes in terror out of a neighbouring house, muffled up in a green caftan.

Old Anaktar-Chiraz?" he replies to us, with an air of suspicion, "What do you want with her?"

Re-assured by our manner: "Yes, certainly this is the place; but she is no longer here; she went away yesterday to go and settle near one of her relations, who is very ill, over there at Kassim-Pacha, from whence

we have just come, quite close to her old home."

At this I am seized with a perfect panic! What shall I do? Time passes, it must be late. I do not even know what the hour is, having in my haste left my watch at the hotel; but it seems to me that the sun is already setting. Night once settled down upon us, there is nothing more to be done at Stamboul—and I have only one day after this one which is drawing to an end. It really seems as though I had had in my sleep the absolute presentiment of what this journey would be, everything happens so exactly as it did in my dream; these never-ending obstacles, this anxiety that the time is too short, this agony that *I shall not have time to reach my goal.*

What shall I do now? I really do not know, and I begin to lose my head a little. Shall we return upon our steps to this Kassim-Pacha whence we have come, and with these poor tired horses which can go no further? No, Eyoub, where I lived and which seems to draw me to it like a lover, is quite close to us, opposite, on the other side of the Golden Horn—which is narrow just here and quickly crossed. Besides, I feel that I have become once more so entirely an inhabitant of this holy suburb, the ten years that separate me from the time when I lived here, vanish so completely, that I almost believe I can return to my old abode in the midst of those familiar forms, and without trouble I imagine I shall find my house just as I left it, with the

dear guests of those old days. At least, I will go in and sit down in the little old *café* where Achmet and I used to spend our winter evenings in the company of dervish story-tellers; it is impossible that I shall not find some one in that place who will know me, take pity on me, and help me in my search — which doubtless can no longer offend any one.

So we send away our horses and descend the steep bank to take a skiff, choosing a young oarsman in order to go quickly, and soon we are gliding along very lightly, with a strong stroke of the oars on the calm water.

I begin to look straight in front of me with wide eyes, watching from afar the other bank where we shall land.

What, do I no longer recognise the

place? It was certainly there though, of that I am quite sure.

Ah, me! everything is changed; my house, it was a very old one, with the two or three round about it, exists no longer. I did not expect this destruction, and I feel a great oppression at my heart. The frame which surrounded my life in Turkey is for ever destroyed—and it all sinks back into a past more and more obliterated.

I land and try to take my bearings, to recognise at least something. The little *café* of the dervish story-tellers, where is that at least? In the square there is a great white wall which I do not recognise, a guard-house, quite new, with soldiers on duty. And the houses all round are closed, silent, absolutely unapproachable. Well, I am

a stranger here now ; I was a fool to come and waste my precious moments, when I ought, on the contrary, to have retraced my steps and followed up the only sure clue by finding the old woman at any cost.

Still, that was a part of my pilgrimage too, to revisit Eyoub, and I was so near.

Ah, the holy mosque, and the avenue of holy tombs ! I am now only two steps from these curious mystic things formerly so familiar to me ; perhaps I shall never return here. Have I the courage to leave Eyoub without seeing them ? After all, if I ran it would only be a loss of five or six minutes, and I say to my boatman : " Pull in a little further on, at the marble steps over there at the entrance to the cemetery."

Leaving the old Greek in the skiff with the boatman, I land alone, overcome all at once by the chill silence of the place, and its funereal echoes which I had forgotten, and which alter the sound of my footsteps. Through the avenue of eternal peace, upon the slabs of marble, greenish in the shade, where one would like to walk slowly with bent head, I am obliged to - day to hurry with that fevered haste which gives to all things thus revisited an inexpressible air of unreality. I run and run through this avenue, between the two lines of funeral kiosks and tombs, in the midst of the hoary whiteness of the marble. Right and left, hemming in the narrow path, are old white walls, broken by a series of pointed arches, through which one's glance plunges

into the shady depths of a sort of grove full of sepulchres. Nothing is changed in all this naturally, as it is sacred and unchangeable; this one place, so strangely mixed up with my love memories, was the same many years before our existence, and will remain so still many years after we two have passed away.

At the end of the avenue, in deeper shadow, under a gloomy vault of plane trees, I stop before the small door of the sacred, impenetrable mosque. There are always the same old beggars here, their faces veiled, cowering motionless on the stones. One of them, waked out of her dream by the noise of my footsteps, is alarmed at seeing me run, and half persuaded that perhaps I shall have the audacity to cross the threshold,—

‘Yasak! Yasak!’ (Forbidden! Forbidden!) she cries in an irritated voice, extending her shrivelled arm as though to bar my passage. And I reply gently in the Turkish language, which I can already speak again with my former facility,—

“I know that it is forbidden, good mother, I only wish just to look inside, and then I shall go,” saying which I gave her an alms; then in a calmer voice she reassures the others who were also becoming uneasy.

“He knows, he knows; he belongs to the country; has only come to look in,” and in fact I take a hasty stealthy glance. How many times in the old days, when I lived at Eyoub, I have come to this threshold, of which I recognise every stone in the dim light of the great trees. From

the dusky shadow where I am standing in the midst of these poor old women, motionless like phantoms, a wondrous brightness seems to light up the hoary age of the whitewash and tiles, over there in the court of the mosque.

Then after this glimpse into the mosque I return swiftly into the holy avenue, overcome with uneasiness at the flight of time, and at the light which seems to me more golden, threatening the near going down of the sun.

It is of course to Kassim-Pacha that I must return, cost what it may, to seek out the old woman. And I shall go by sea this time, it will be the quickest way from here.

Once more in the skiff, I say to the boatman; "Row quickly, quickly, and I will pay you well!" He replies

with a smile that shows all his white teeth, and begins to row with all the strength of his arms. The tide is with us, and we descend the Golden Horn briskly, leaving gloomy Eyoub behind us.

But we pass the suburb of Hadjikeui; suppose I stop there. It is not so wild a quarter as that I have just left, and who knows, someone might recognise me, perhaps; one of those Jews who were in my service—big Salomon, or even old Kairoullah; no matter who, if only they can give me information. In passing I will try . . . and so I shall be able to see my house again, the first of my Turkish houses, for I lived there, too, before I was able to realise the almost hopeless dream of settling at Eyoub.

In that youthful work of mine in

which I have related my life in the East, I have passed over in silence our stay at Hadjikeuï, for brevity's sake, and also in answer to a sort of feeling of decorum, which amuses me a good deal now. This Hadjikeuï is a poor suburb, rather despised at Constantinople.

However, it was there that I installed myself in the first instance on quitting my European lodging at Pera; there I received Aziyadé for the first time on her return from Salonica. We remained there for nearly two months, well concealed, before we succeeded in finding a house on the other shore, in the neighbourhood of the holy tombs, and afterwards, to be ready for any emergency, we kept possession of this our first shelter, whither, as the

fancy seized us, we returned now and again.

In time how everything becomes transformed in one's memory, and forgotten. Here I do not even remember the landing-stage leading to our street ; that is to say, the bridge of old planks, which was so familiar to us then, and where we could land with the security of long habit in the protecting mystery of the blackest night.

From impatience I land elsewhere, at the entrance to a narrow Jewish street which I remember vaguely—very vaguely, and, always followed by the old Greek, I begin to hurry along and run, urged on ceaselessly by anxiety about the time.

At a turning we come upon a

street in which a Jewish market is being held; cries of buyers and sellers, a busy crowd surrounded by baskets, fruits, vegetables, little stoves upon which they roast meat in the open air, little stalls of money-changers and usurers. . . . Here, for instance, I feel quite at home, and my heart beats quicker for my old dwelling must be quite near at hand.

I had besides a very singular, almost unique, remembrance of this market, for whether living at Hadjikeuï or Eyoub, I used to come here every evening with Achmet, to change or borrow money from these Jews, or perhaps to buy from them the bread and cakes destined for Aziyadé's secret repast. Constantinople is the only town in the world where I have really taken part in the life of the people—

the life of this Oriental people, noisy, full of colour, picturesque but needy and poor, a life busy with a thousand little trades, a thousand chafferings. My daily companion Achmet was himself a child of this people, knowing all the shifts of its laborious life, accustomed to manage on next to nothing, and teaching me his methods, making me for the time being a man of the people like himself. It is true I too was poor at that time, and hard put to it sometimes to keep up my *rôle* of Hassan. . . .

This market which I pass through to-day with a rapid free step, feeling the weight of my leathern belt, into which, rather after the manner of sailors, I had had my spare gold pieces sewn, oh! this market, what sufferings it recalls to me, gaily

endured for her sake, timid bargaining, asking credit for sums that make me smile now. . . . And in my Turkish dress it all seemed right enough, and almost amused me, giving me more and more the impression of having given up my old life and become one of the simple people about me. There was so much that was childish in my life of those days.

After the market street we come into a quiet square by the sea-side, a silent place with vine arbours around it, and ornamented in the middle with an old marble fountain. And there is my home, re-appearing before me all at once, very real in the beautiful evening sunlight. . . . At last I have found something of that old time, something which has been a part of my dear past, and which still exists.

With a kind of fear of approaching it, with a strange trouble at my heart, I go slowly and sit down opposite to it in the open air, before a little *café* under a vine yellowed by autumn, and I gaze at it. (How poorly that word *café* gives the idea of these Oriental booths in which one smokes a narghileh.) I look at it, my little house of long ago, rather as I might look at something from dreamland which had dared to show itself in open day. It seems to me to have grown smaller and poorer; and moreover it is so, and even the marks of age upon its walls bring back a thousand memories to me.

The place has not been altered at all; not a stone has been displaced since I inhabited it. Is it really possible that everything has

remained exactly as it was, that the sun lights it up so gaily, that I find myself here once more, still young, and that for years I have known nothing at all about *her*, not even whether she is alive, or sleeping in the earth? . . .

This is my first moment of repose and thought since I began my long wanderings. The October sun which at first seemed to me joyous, now suddenly, on this solitary spot, seems to have become sad, sadder than the mist or the darkness of night. It no longer charms or deceives me; at present, I am only conscious of its impossibility before the continual annihilation, the continual ending of things. I feel death and the sadness of death in its soft light; its rays are full of death. . . .

A young boy comes to serve us, and I ask him,—

“Is your master old? Has this *café* been here long?”

“The master! Oh! for perhaps fifty years,” he replies, astonished; “he is a *very old man*.”

“Well, tell him to come and speak to me.”

I remember the old man’s face at once, as soon as I see him.

“Do you remember me? I used to live there in the house opposite many years ago.”

“Ah! yes,” he says wonderingly. “And it is you who later went to live at Eyoub. And yet, no—it must be at least twenty years since what I am speaking of—(they always calculate time very badly in Turkey)—you would be older than you are.”

“And do you remember my servant Achmet?”

He remembers my servant Achmet very well, but he can give me no information about him; he has not been seen in Hadjikeuī since my departure.

I tell him to go and call together all the old people of the quarter, all those who can more or less recall me.

And soon a crowd gathers—neighbours, the curious, all sorts of people—who look upon me as a ghost from the other world: astonished, they too, to see me still young. It seems to me that, in the memory of every one of them, the time of my stay here has by degrees disappeared into the remote and uncertain ages.

I thought as much—they have not

forgotten the Frenchman who had the extraordinary idea to come and bury himself here; but, alas! of Achmet they can tell me nothing. They offer, however, if I like, to go and find a Jew who used to know me very well, and who might be able to give me news, perhaps—a man called Salomon.

Salomon! I should think I would like to see Salomon. Let them bring him to me at once, and they shall be rewarded. I used often to employ this Salomon; he would go with Achmet to make purchases for me, and was aware, too, of the clandestine comings and goings of a Mahomedan lady in my house. It is true that, just before I left, I sent him away for some dishonesty or other, which I no longer remember

—but what of that, if he can help me. It will even almost give me joy to see him again, as it does to see anything that belongs to that part of my past life. . . .

Here he comes. He bears me no ill-will, that is certain, for he seems quite overcome at recognising me, and kisses the hand that I extend to him. I left him a tall, superb-looking man—I find him again quite bent and grey.

“Achmet,” he says, “no, I have never seen him, or heard mention of him since your departure. He must have left the country—or, perhaps he is dead.”

Then he promises to spend his evening in making inquiries, and to come up to-morrow morning to Pera to tell me the result.

Let us go, I shall find out nothing more here. Another useless halt, and time presses—we must start again. . . .

However, I should like to go into my house, as I am so near. Especially I should like to go up to the first story, to that room which I prepared with such loving care to receive her.

And I send Salomon to parley with the people living there—Armenians, who consent, for a silver piece, to open their doors to me.

I enter, walk up our stairs, and see before me our beloved little room, that used to be so pretty in its strange arrangement. Nothing is left of all that now, only poverty-stricken furniture, untidiness, and rags lying about. I should have

done better to have forborne to look upon this pitiful profanation ; the mere sight of it suffices to push back further and further into the abyss, the traces of the past which I am pursuing.

But as I re-descend those stairs which Aziyadé's papooches have pressed, I am overcome by a poignant emotion which I did not foresee. . . .

One day, long ago in my childhood, a certain winter sunbeam shining through a staircase window, impressed me in a profound inexplicable manner. I have already related this somewhere, I do not know where. And here so many years later, I have felt the same kind of shudder, seeing again in this Hadjikeuï house the same sort of sunbeam, with the

same mysterious significance, which every evening glided down the staircase, and lighted up an Athenian amphora standing in a niche of the wall. . . . Sometimes the smallest details become engraved for ever on one's memory, and one might say that they contain within themselves a whole space of time, a whole epoch, painful or regretted. It was so with this sunbeam—mixed up with, I know not what, *unknown past*—I have thought of this a hundred times since I left Turkey, and a strange pang, a pang that was both strange and disquieting always struck through me at the thought that I should never again see this gleam of pale light falling upon this amphora in its niche, never, never again. . . .

Ah, well! the empty niche is still there, and as I descend the stairs, the sun lights it up with the same sad ray. . . .

In all that I have just said, I have lost my way once again among things that cannot be put into words. . . .

We get into the skiff again, the Greek and I, after this halt which has lasted twenty precious minutes, and continue our journey towards Kassim-Pacha with all the speed of our oars.

On the Golden Horn there is the usual coming and going, the incessant crossing of slender silent skiffs. And how beautiful the afternoon is—warm and bright. It almost persuades me that it is summer, coming

as I do from the fir forests of the Karpathians, where snow had already begun to fall. . . . And I allow myself to be deluded by the sunshine. By degrees I am lulled and carried away by all this movement once so familiar to me; as I did at Eyoub just now, little by little, I think myself back in that far away time when I had a mysterious dwelling-place on either shore. . . . The surroundings, besides, have remained so exactly the same. The great domes of the mosques rise in the same places; the enormous outline of Stamboul presides over all this joyous movement of the boats, exactly as ten years ago it watched over our adventurous love trysts. . . . Ah! how is it possible to express the

charm of this spot which men call the Golden Horn! . . . How even give a faint idea of it; it is made up of my sufferings, of my trembling joys, mingling under the shadow of Islam; I daresay it only exists for me alone. . . .

At the landing stage of Kassim-Pacha we soon land in front of that palace of Moorish architecture which is the Admiralty. There I look at the time. . . . What have I been thinking about; I must be very troubled in mind not to have noticed that in fact the sun is high in the heavens, it is hardly half-past three! I feel relieved to find that the day is not yet too near its end. . . .

Ten minutes hurried walking brings us again to the quarter where we

shall perhaps find Anaktar-Chiraz. Our way lies through small old streets, very Mahommedan in character, where women in papooches and muslin veils are walking about.

After my long and useless peregrination, I have come back to my starting point here at Hadji-Ali; quiet and solitary between its small low houses, like a village square, and I seat myself at the same little *café* as before, in the garden, under the yellow vine whose leaves are falling. This nook, peaceful, poor, almost rural, will be an excellent place in which to talk over the past without witnesses, amidst surroundings that have not altered for centuries. It might almost have been chosen for the somewhat mournful interview before me, for the sad things drawn

from the ashes of the past, which we shall surely have to tell one another.

I send the Greek to ferret out Anaktar-Chiraz, and beg her to come here and speak to me for a moment. I really believe that this time he will find her; I am only anxious as to whether she will consent to come or will be afraid, and I call for a narghileh, while I am waiting. The evening becomes warmer and warmer, suggesting summer evenings; the sun, just setting, gilds the antique mosque in front of me, and the leafless vine under which I am sitting. No one passes in the square, only muffled sounds reach me from the Golden Horn and its boats. All about me deep silence. Minute after minute of waiting go by. There is nothing to

tell of the great town close at hand, and I feel entirely now as though it were summer, the end of a summer day in some Oriental village, and a wonderful feeling of peace steals over me.

At last the Greek returns, followed by an old woman clothed in black, swarthy, hard-featured, whom I recognise at once. I only saw her once in my life, but I know her. She looks frightened, haggard, and has aged terribly. If only she remembers!

She is evidently afraid of these unknown people, of this interrogatory which she is to undergo in this out-of-the-way place. With a ceremonious salutation, she sits down before me on the edge of a stool, and looks at me. I am sitting with my back to

the light, so she sees me in shadow against a background of sunlight.

Ah! yes, certainly it is she. I remember especially that half smile, so good, so honest, which for a moment lights up her hard parchment-like face. A plait of her hair, still as black as ebony, is wound round the silk foulard, also black, which she wears on her head like a fillet. Her dress, worn but clean, is made in the European style, old-fashioned, and trimmed with cross bands of black velvet. In some of our southern villages in France, in Auvergne, old women dress and look just like this. She sits bolt upright on her stool and waits.

I begin to question her in fear and trembling in the Turkish tongue, anxious as to her replies.

"Achmet? Achmet?" she says, looking at me out of her haggard eyes. No, she does not remember. It is so long since the story that I have been telling her—and she has nursed so many, seen so many die in her life, young men and old—and there are so many *Achmets* in Constantinople! "And also," she says, to excuse herself, "I have lost one after the other, my husband and my sons. Since then my head is strange and I have lost my memory."

My God! How am I to pierce through her darkened intelligence, how shall I begin? . . . She is frightened too, perhaps of being questioned upon some law business, afraid of I know not what.

"Do not be afraid of us, my good woman," I say. "I am trying to find

this Achmet because I loved him tenderly, for no other reason whatever. Do try to remember. I want to see him again, help me, see, I entreat you. Let us try: Achmet, Mihran - Achmet? I recognise you, and am sure that I came with him to speak to you here ten years ago when you lived in this quarter. And I even wrote to him to your house during the first three years which followed my departure. Do you not remember nursing him when he was wounded, and so ill? . . .

A light seems to break upon her mind. She bends forwards to look at me nearer; her eyes open wide, become dilated as she looks into the very depths of mine. "What is your name?" she demands in a brusque voice.

“Loti!”

“Loti!” . . . Ah Loti! . . . Ah Achmet! . . . Ah Mihran-Achmet! Yes, yes, of course I remember Mihran-Achmet!”

A silence of some seconds during which her face becomes quite overcast. Then she continues in a hard voice: *Eulû! Eulû! Yedi seneh dan, tchok dan euldi!* (Dead! dead! seven years ago, it is a long while since he died!)

How strange it sounds! the first part of this reply, the cruel tone of it, the jarring repetition of that first word with its sinister alliteration. At one time I used to imagine for Aziyadé something exactly similar. . . . *Eulû! Eulû!* I used to think that that word would haunt me pitilessly, to tell me of her death.

And I listen almost unmoved to the mournful sentence, nearly forgetting Achmet, in thinking to myself that the clue becomes more and more difficult to grasp, that there is no more hope for me except from Achmet's sister, Ériknaz, and that at any cost I must find her, this very evening too.

The old woman continues,—“On the night of his death he kept calling you, Loti! Loti! Loti! . . . Therefore it is to you, to you he owes his death!”

This, too, I expected. I know that it is not true, that he died from his wound, poor fellow; but I am not surprised, as he called upon me in his death agony, that I should be suspected of having cast some deadly spell over him. I am only astonished to feel so little moved, as though my

heart were shut, or filled with other thoughts, not of him.

“Do you know where his tomb is?” I ask simply. “Then you will take me to it to-morrow. . . . But there is Ériknaz, his sister, of whom I have need; tell me where she lives, take me to her at once, will you?” “Ériknaz?” . . . of whom do I speak! Six months after her brother, she too was put into her coffin. As to her daughter, Alemshah, she is married and gone to live a long way from here on the Asiatic coast near Ismir. . . .

And Anaktar-Chiraz motions with her hand, as though she were scattering dust, and would say that all that world is dead and done with. It is wiped out; there is nothing left of it.

And so it is broken, the clue upon

which I had counted; it is broken, and buried in the earth for years with Ériknaz. As to this woman talking to me, it is useless to question her about Aziyadé, she did not even know of her existence.

“She is a good and holy woman,” said Achmet, “but it would not do to confide our secrets to her, she would not be able to keep them.” And my plan has melted away, and the day is closing in, and I know not what more to do. . . .

Now she overwhelms me with questions, Anaktar-Chiraz, who has quite softened towards me however, because she sees how much I suffer. Why did I disappear for ten years without even replying to the dying Achmet’s letter? What has brought me back to-day? What do I want to know

from Ériknaz, and what mystery lies under it all?

And I, I no longer answer her, for I am overcome with sorrow, and lost in thought. . . . But all at once I recall another sister of Achmet's. How came I to forget her. It is true there was a kind of mystery surrounding this strange creature. I only saw her once, and that was in the dark. Ériknaz and Achmet hardly ever saw her themselves, and always lowered their voices in speaking of her; she was much older than they, already quite an old woman, whom they feared and venerated, calling her in a low voice "mother." But she knew of Aziyadé's existence, and where she lived, and knew also the negress Kadidja. I cannot understand why I did not think of her before. . . . And I ask tremblingly,

“Do you remember that there was an old sister . . . who lived by herself down there by the Sweet Waters?”

Thank God she remembers her, and believes that she is still alive, and living in the same house over there. But she is a very strange person, has had great sorrows, and lives in retirement. Anaktar-Chiraz has not seen her for seven years, ever since the funeral.

“Quick, quick,” I cry. “I beg you to take me to her.”

She objects, that it is growing late, that the sun is going down, that her patient is expecting her. Would not to-morrow do as well, it is so far away, and even if we went would she receive us; it is not at all certain.

I beg and entreat of her to go with

me, for I dare not offer her money, even though she appears to be poor. I implore her, and by degrees I see her looks soften. Well, well, then yes, she will take me there this evening. She must go and tell her sick patient, then she will return and we will start together.

I send away the Greek who has become too attentive, too inquisitive, and I remain alone, following with my eyes the black dress of the old woman as she disappears.

Some minutes of quiet and silence pass while I wait for her return. Above my head the ragged vine is lighted up by degrees with ruddy gold, and a golden flush also spreads over the mosque opposite, over the great cypresses, over everything; the evening, the peaceful evening descends

upon this little out-of-the-way corner where I have received confirmation of Achmet's death. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that she, too, Aziyadé, like him, lies asleep in Turkish earth. And instead of the terrible anguish which I should once have suffered, I now feel only a tender melancholy in thinking of these lost ones, a melancholy soothed by the knowledge that they are at rest, and a longing soon to rejoin them and be with them at peace. To this unchanging calm of Islam which I feel around me, the peaceful charm of this closing day joins to bid me rest, and my pain is merged in unresisting resignation to the universal doom.

.
Oh! if only those two dear ones,
who loved me so devotedly, and

whom I now almost confound in an equal tenderness that is free from all taint of earth, if only they might return to me for one instant, with what unutterable joy, what deep emotion I should fold them in my arms.

.

The kind old woman returns, ready to follow me to Achmet's sister, and once again our footsteps are turned towards the shore, to find the skiff and my boatman, who will row us down to Pri-Pacha, near the Sweet Waters.

On our way we shall have to pass the same Mussulman quarters which we saw just now, with a rosy glow upon them, and that are now lighted up with the last rays of the setting sun, and alive with the evening life

of the East, full of brilliantly-coloured costumes.

At the Kassim-Pacha landing-stage our confiding boatman awaits us, asleep in the skiff. And in the declining day we once more glide along on the waters of the Golden Horn, in the direction opposite to our former journey. On the southern shore the light dies out little by little behind Stamboul—the final transformation-scene of day.

The sun has sunk out of sight when we land on the other side of Pri-Pacha, in the extreme outskirts, bordering the immense cemeteries. And here are we—the Armenian woman and I—walking together very quickly in the twilight through a part that I do not know at all, a mean, little Armenian quarter, with narrow winding streets

and wooden houses, painted brown or red, and grated like dungeons.

Anaktar-Chiraz stops before one of these mysterious-looking houses, and knocks with the iron knocker. The noise resounds in a sinister manner through the silence of the death-like neighbourhood.

Soon the door is cautiously opened a very little way, and in the shadowy aperture appears a ghost-like form, which makes me shudder; the face of a woman of fifty, sad and thin and faded, but still resembling Achmet, with one of those likenesses so striking that they frighten you. Evidently his sister, with the same features, the same expression, the same eyes, so like him that I feel as though he were before me again, aged by thirty added years, and looking at me reproachfully

from the further side of time and death.

She is surprised, and hesitates, ready to shut her hardly-opened door.

"Loti!" old Anaktar hastens to say to her, pronouncing the name quite low, as one might announce a ghost. "Look at him; it is Loti! . . Loti who has returned!"

"Loti? . . . Loti?" repeats the other, in a trembling voice. "Ah, Loti!" she adds, after a silence, in a bitter, mournful tone, which goes more to my heart than the keenest reproaches would have done. . . .

They talk to each other in Turkish, in low voices and very quickly, saying things of which the sense escapes me. Then they ask me to come in, and I follow them up a little dark staircase.

On the first floor, in a room furnished after the Oriental manner, but gloomy and poverty-stricken, they beg me to sit down on a worn divan; then this sister of Achmet's hastens to make me some coffee—which is in the East a duty of hospitality—and, while she comes and goes at her little stove, washing for me her poor, coarse cups, I see the great tears silently chasing each other down her cheeks.

Ah! how sad it is here in the twilight, in this bare room, where this woman is weeping; and how oppressed my heart is, and the words which I would say are arrested and die away. . . .

They are quite aware, both of them, that I have come to tell or to ask something very grave. But what is it? I remain silent; they wait, and

the silence becomes heavier and heavier in the falling night.

.

I tremble as I say to her,—

“You will remember *Madame Azi-yadé*, the little Turkish lady whom your brother also loved—you remember her?”

Then she puts down her cups and the napkin, as though to be more at liberty, understanding that the interrogation has begun; and she bends her head affirmatively, with a movement of her hands which signifies, “Ah! indeed, I remember. How could I forget it all!”

.

Silence again, during which I hear, as it were, a succession of little blows struck upon my temples—the quickened pulsation of the beating arteries. And

at last, in an abrupt, half-stifled voice,
I put the supreme question,—

“She is dead, is she not?”

.

She does not speak at once, she looks at me, and her mournful, hollow eyes assume an expression of surprise that is almost disdainful. . . . Then, after some seconds of suspense, it breaks upon me slowly that it is *yes*. . . .

I had indeed grasped it, beyond a doubt, before she continued in a tone of bitter inquiry,—

“Really! do you not know it?”

And I reply in a low voice with the lie,—

“Yes, I know, I know.” Then I add, in a lower voice still, like a stammering child: “It is not that . . . that I wished to ask you . . . I wished

. . . I wished to beg you to tell me where they have buried her. . . .”

And silence falls upon us again, more profound than before. I told that lie because I was ashamed before her, not to have known of Aziyadé's death, and to have lived all those years without knowing. But I see well that she does not believe me, and that she still looks upon me with curiosity mixed with aversion and reproach. . . . My demeanour also puzzles her; our composure, our calm endurance in sorrow, are quite incomprehensible to Orientals, who, when they suffer, cry aloud. . . .

The silence becomes more and more icy, one might say that between us the air was frozen. And in the grated house, in the poor strange room the twilight deepens; between

the narrow lattice-work of wood which screens the windows there enters only a dim, colourless light; the night seems to me to fall quickly, spasmodically, as if one by one veils of crape were being hastily flung over us. . . .

Thus it was to this miserable lodging, and at this lonely hour, that I had to come to hear my final sentence. . . .

I know not how many seconds or minutes I remain there without speaking, seated between these two women, one of whom is weeping.

Achmet's sister, according to hospitable custom, has brought me a small cup of coffee which I drink slowly, always with the same apparent tranquillity. But within me, in the unfathomed depths of thought and

memory, everything is astir as in the dim phantasmagoria of a dream. I feel as if I were present at some immense catastrophe; things which were stable melt away and are brought to nothingness; in my fancy, I hear mighty thunders that accompany their fall, then all ceases and is still when all is ruin; and the silence comes, that silence of the soul no less mournful than the silence of external things. . . .

Achmet's sister does not know where Aziyadé has been buried, she tells me coldly in answer to my repeated question, but, she adds, the negress Kadidja, who is still alive, knows it without doubt, and *if I really wish it* she will go to-morrow and ask her, or even beg her to take me to it.

"To-morrow—oh, no, this evening,

at once!" After that moment of death-like calm, life returns to me, bringing with it my old anxiety about the flight of time.

At first she refuses. Go with me to the negress in the old part of Stamboul at nightfall! . . . No, she says, it is impossible, she dare not do it.

Just now I had to implore the other woman, now I implore this one, and in her turn I see her soften towards me. Well, yes, she will go, but alone, she prefers it. She will go to Kadidja to warn her and arrange a rendezvous; then to-morrow morning she will return with a skiff, and bring her to me wherever I wish. . . .

And so at last our plan for to-morrow is arranged; at eight o'clock we will all meet on this side of

the Golden Horn, at Kassim-Pacha, in the little square of Hadji-Ali; I shall come in a carriage in which to drive the Armenian woman and the negress, who are each to guide me to one of the tombs, while Achmet's sister, always keeping in the background, will return to her solitary dwelling. It is agreed, promised, sworn to, and now we all three prepare to start.

While Achmet's sister is getting ready to go out I try to question her. But she knows hardly anything, always living in retirement, she has never heard any precise details about Aziyadé's death. "To-morrow Kadidja will tell me all that, to-morrow." As for the time, she opens an old note-book in which some dates are written down in Turkish, and going

close to the grating of one of the windows, where there is still a gleam of light, she says: "Let us see, it was in the end of the spring which preceded Achmet's death, the year 1397 of the Hegira. Therefore that must be a few months over seven years ago." She knows that they removed the body in the evening, almost by stealth; but that old Abeddin, her master—who also died last year—had nevertheless put up a marble tombstone to her. And that is all. "To-morrow Kadidja will tell me the rest, to-morrow!"

She is ready now, has put on, over her poor dress, an old black shawl, and we go downstairs together—she bolting all the doors carefully after us as we pass out.

Through the small street, which has

grown darker, we take our way to the sea, where we are to separate.

Achmet's sister hires a boat to take her to Stamboul; the old Armenian woman gets into mine, which is waiting for me, and sits down beside me; I land her at Kassim-Pacha as we go by, and continue on my way alone on the Golden Horn to return to Pera, now that my dismal day is at an end. On reflection, I am glad that my interview with Kadidja is put off till to-morrow, and can be arranged beforehand, for I dread to face this old woman; I fear her ill-will and contempt. . . . I even recall Achmet's sister, who is already gliding on apace on the grey water, and with one hand I hold on to her light skiff, to give her many messages. "You will tell Kadidja that it was military services which prevented me

from returning — expeditions, distant wars ; it was not my fault, indeed ; if I had not loved *Madame Aziyadé*, should I be here this evening, returned from so far, after ten years, for her sake ! You will tell her that, will you not ? ” Then I stop, for I feel that my voice is breaking. I must pull myself together. I am almost on the point of shedding tears. “ I will tell her, Loti ; I will tell her,” she replies, and I think I see an altogether softened expression on her worn face. Then our boats separate in the growing twilight. . . .

My melancholy day is ended—with its agitations, its sufferings, its anxieties, its prayers ! All ended, and ended too the drama whose last act has been suspended for ten years. . . .

We glide along rapidly on the water ; beside me the Armenian woman sits

silent, upright, in her black dress. A calm, as of death, begins to settle down upon me; it seems to me now that this country, this city, which I have dreamt about for so long, begin all at once to lose their inexpressible charm, together with their overpowering mystery; that Stamboul is empty, and my heart empty also, and my soul; I feel a kind of weariness of everything, and a desire to leave this Turkey as soon as possible, never to return.

We keep on our way with powerful strokes like people in a hurry to arrive somewhere. Wherefore all this haste? I do not know. There is no need to hurry now, as everything is over. And where are we going? I no longer even know. I fear lest this old woman beside me should speak to me, and break the silence which I

feel I need ; I fear that she may question me about Aziyadé, about all the unexpected and astonishing things that she has learnt. I turn away my head not to meet her eyes, and I look at the marvellous scene around me without seeing it. Stamboul, its reflection reversed in the calm water, the thousand skiffs crossing and recrossing each other, gliding along noiselessly in the dainty fairy scenes of costumes and colours. All this, which had disappeared from my view for years, and which has returned to me like an enchanted dream, tells me nothing more ; no more than the delicious weather, mild, warm, and soft as in summer. . . .

At Kassim-Pacha landing-place we stop at last to leave the old woman

in her black dress, whose presence, even though she was silent, had become such an embarrassment to me. "Good - bye," says Anaktar - Chiraz, going on her way. "God be with you, and to-morrow morning be at the rendezvous for the tombs."

I go on alone, feeling as though relieved of a dead weight, but following her with my eyes nevertheless, and almost regretting her, because she is a connecting link with the dear past.

My boatman, with the coaxing manner of a tired child, shows me his bare arms, which he says begin to hurt him : "Must we keep on at this rapid pace?" Ah ! no, what is the use now ; I had forgotten to tell him so. . . . I have no longer any object, and no one awaits me anywhere in this great city,

where I am no more known than the dead. It does not matter where we go now. There is nothing more to do but to wander free and alone, trying to find out, here and there, traces, memories of the old days. So I reply : "No, go very slowly, and whither you will, let the skiff go with the current, draw in your oars and rest ; fold your arms if you like, and sing to me. . . ."

And soon we are almost motionless, drifting only with the stream. The boatman has crossed his arms, and begins to sing. The weather is wonderful—mild—surprisingly mild ; I listen to his song, which is high and plaintive, and look about me already with rather more interest, more life, than I had just now. Truly, since she went—the poor old woman, in her black dress,

who sat beside me like a picture of remorse—I feel a sudden relief—too sudden—it astonishes and confounds me . . . I look about me now more and more, almost with my habitual eagerness of sight. . . . The look of everything is changed in the gathering night; lights have been lighted on land, on the ships, on the silent skiffs, which glide about in every direction. Stamboul is nothing but a sombre outline of cupolas and minarets against the still clear sky. In the middle of the Golden Horn we go along with the current all the time, and from both sides at once there come to us, somewhat muffled, that Oriental murmur, that confused mixture of sounds which I should recognise as belonging to Constantinople amongst all the noises in the world.

How exactly like old times it is, everything has remained the same. Without having seen them again, I picture to myself all those quarters on both shores in which I have wandered about night after night; I know all that is going on there, all that is bought and sold, all that is hidden away, all that is sung! So keen is the memory that I have never, as at this moment, been so completely under the illusion of having plunged once again into the vanished past — and nothing that I could say, if I wrote whole pages or volumes upon it, could express the nameless melancholy that this impression brings. . . .

On the other hand, how different everything is in myself, and in my circumstances since that time of youth! . . . Then I was poor and quite

unknown; the irregular and dangerous life I lead here was constantly in danger, and I had nowhere anyone to help me; a complaint from the Embassy, an order from someone in authority, could at any moment have ruined me. In those days I was often at a loss for a few silver pieces, when it was a question of buying a Turkish costume, a weapon, or even of sending Salomon to the little shops in the neighbourhood to buy our supper. Then it was that I had to take my chance with those crowds, the murmur of which I can hear this evening on the banks, those men of the people with whom my whim had brought me in contact. Amongst them I had money-lenders, creditors, friends who were useful to me, and enemies whose treachery I dreaded. Now I could

buy all these small enemies ten times over, and their silence too, simply with the gold in my belt. My horizon is enlarged since then, enlarged beyond measure, and I am almost a king compared to the lonely creature I was then. Ah, well, all that which ten years ago would have made my life here with her an enchantment, has come too late, I fear, for I care very little about it now; some cord within me has snapped, some part of myself lies buried in Turkish earth with Aziyadé.

The great panorama before me continues to change, the mysterious domes become indistinct and almost diaphanous in the night, the lights are innumerable, and overhead the stars are shining. The weather grows milder, without a breath of wind, and

is like a summer evening. I look about me, waked out of my deathlike torpor, look eagerly with dilated eyes to see everything, and I feel myself full of contradictions which fill me with apprehension. Sometimes I am entirely faithful to the beloved memory, sad to the depths of my soul, and for all time, overcome with the feeling, (which, alas! I already know to be transitory, from having experienced it before) of the fading and the end of all earthly things; then the moment after comes a return of life, a sort of selfish triumph at finding myself still alive, still young, still thirsting for love; I am swayed in spite of myself by the influences of this eastern land, this soft warmth of evening, my memory of past delights, by all those things which I ought not to care any more about.

Ten years for our human souls which endure so short a space is really an infinity of time! . . . Ten years of separation, of silence, seem to make chasms in the memory; to bring about disuetude, strange moments of forgetfulness, almost a beginning of night, even between the fondest lovers. . . . And the realization of this is, in itself, one of the bitterest of disillusionments.

We land in the dark at the foot of the great bridge of Stamboul, and I return to my hotel at Pera.

Some dinner at the *table d'hôte* in the company of tourists, whose acquaintance I made yesterday in the Orient Express, or on the steamer at Varna; and for a time I become like the rest of the world again—

chatting, while my memory sleeps, hardly remembering that it is to be to-morrow—to-morrow morning—that terrible interview with Kadidja, and the visit to the grave.

But, directly after dinner, I order a horse to take me to Stamboul (it always seems an absurd thing to the people of the European hotels that one should go to Stamboul at night—above all alone). I am going there to look once more, even in the darkness, upon the house of old Abeddin—that house in which she must have died, and from which “one evening they removed her almost by stealth.” . . .

At first I trot quickly through the streets of Galata, full of light, of noise and music; then, at this end of the bridge, which unites the two towns, where the shadow and the silence begin,

I stop, according to custom, to light the lantern which a runner will carry before me during my ride on the other bank ; and soon, having passed the bridge, here I am in this immense Stamboul — black, silent, and dead. During the day, having been engaged elsewhere, I have only been able to see it in the distance ; and, after those ten years of absence, I arrive, in the middle of the night, exactly as on the evening when I came there for the first time in my life, during the feast of Baïram.

A dark night, the stars shining dimly. My eyes become accustomed to the gloom, and by degrees I am able to see through it ; and without trouble, as though I had only left yesterday, I trot through its labyrinthine streets, between the great walls

without windows, recognising by the way the old grated palaces, the funeral kiosks in which the night-lamp burns, and the domes of the white, silent mosques, that rise one above another into the sky; and by the light of my lantern, which runs and dances along in front of me, I see on the ground, all along the road, dusky masses, which are dogs asleep.

I hasten on very quickly, for it is late, and old Abeddin's house is a long way off.

At the turning of a street, at last, the great deserted square of Mehmed Fatih opens before me, surrounded with a series of small lifeless domes, white as shrouds. I am nearing the end of my journey, almost there now. As I ride across the square my

horse's hoofs ring out more clearly on the flags, awakening gloomy echoes all around. Then again I lose myself in the obscurity of a narrow street,—and it is there, quite near, that the house will appear to my view, the old wooden house, high and gloomy, painted dark red, with its windows of projecting gratings, upon which are painted yellow butterflies and blue tulips. Not a soul to be seen here, not an open door, not a sound of life, not a light. I have considerably slackened my pace, and I direct the light of my runner's lantern upon the old walls, and underneath the old balconies, with their impenetrable gratings, so that I may not miss it as we pass. But suddenly there is nothing more before me, an indefinite emptiness, covered with fallen stones and

blackened girders, and my horse stumbles over the rubbish. . . . Fire has done its work here, one of those great conflagrations which, in this country, burn up whole districts in a few hours. "It happened last winter," my runner tells me, waving his lantern right and left, better to point out the desolation to me. Not even the trace of a street is left; for about three or four hundred yards there is nothing but *débris*. Let us go, it is finished, the house in which Aziyadé closed her eyes has disappeared in the flames, . . . in face of these ruins, it only remains to me to retrace my steps. . . .

And I turn away, walking my horse, and taking any road at random in the dark night.

That heap of ruins. . . . No, I

never foresaw that ; that destruction is a little more than I was prepared to expect. I did not think I cared much for this gloomy quarter, but I did believe, doubtless because it was already centuries old, that it would, at least, last my time, and now my distress is increased at the thought that never, never again shall I be able to come and wander about in the street which was hers, under the high grated balconies of the house where the half of her life was passed.

As I go along I look at nothing else, and in the depths of my soul I suffer a sort of despair, gloomy and overpowering, without compensation, without charm, simply hopeless. The remembrance of her, my regrets about her, and my heavy remorse, cling to me like an oppressive mantle of grief ;

nothing can distract me at this moment. And then there is the discouraging question which forces itself upon me with freezing clearness: what is the use of what I am going to do to-morrow? What childish sentiment this visit to her tomb is. Will there be anything of her there to know that I have returned, to have the least consciousness of the kiss I shall give to the cold earth that covers the remains of what was her body? Oh, the bitter, hopeless sorrow of never, never again being able to exchange a single thought with her! Poor little Aziyadé, there are so many things that I never knew how to tell her which are burning in my heart now, and which I would tell her there, if only for a few moments she might return to me for a last meet-

ing. I would tell her that I had loved her much more tenderly than she, or than I myself, had been aware, that the grief of having lost her would never leave me, and ask her pardon for being alive, young still, and able to love again. I would tell her all this, and then, after a last fond leave-taking, I would leave her to her rest in the earth. But no, we must suffer for eternity under a terribly cruel misunderstanding; soon it will be my turn to die also, making this misunderstanding more irreparable, and the silence yet more final between us, because all the things which I could not say to her, but which were alive deep down in my heart, will die with me.

And time will still go on, and our two names will be forgotten — separately. . . .

Wandering on, always at random through the labyrinthine streets in the dark night, I end by finding myself quite in the centre of the silent town, in a certain quarter of special sanctity, near the mosque of Sultan Selim ; all around are tombs, cypresses, and funeral kiosks, in which small lamps are burning that light up the catafalques within. And here I have reached a street unique in its way and exquisite, very straight but Arab in character, its buildings all white-washed, with a row of ogive doorways all down each side. Its last century houses consist of a ground floor only, very low, letting one see right and left stretches of sky. We are here on the central height of Stamboul, commanding a view of the whole neighbourhood. The domes of the neighbouring

mosque rise into the bluish dusk of the air, white as snow and indefinite, like those circles which form round the moon. The street continues, a long line of melancholy arcades, until it is lost in the deep shadow; but some distance down a door still open sheds a gleam of light on the white pavement. . . . Ah, it is the very same little old *café* that I used to frequent with Achmet rather late at night during our rambles on foot through this great Stamboul. How comes it to be open so late? I might think it is for me, that they expect me, and call me. I shall dismount for a moment, to sit there outside under the arcades, in the coolness of the night.

Everything here has remained intact; the old paintings, the old engravings

of Mecca hung on the walls, I recognise them all. Opposite, in the middle of the street, there still stands the antique marble fountain, having at the top something which resembles a black head of hair, and which I know to be a tuft of fern; and doubtless the stool which the proprietor brings me has served me more than once before.

I remember well that formerly, when seated here, you could see the pious dervishes at long intervals, passing on their way to the Mosque. And this evening, just as I am thinking of them, a group of these dervishes appears. They walk along slowly, and turn to look at this person, belated at such an unusual hour, before the only *café* which is open in the whole length of the deserted avenue, whose end is lost in darkness.

I also remember that there used to be a musician here, an old man who, throughout the evening, in the back of the strange little room, played Oriental airs on the violin, airs that were almost heart-breaking in their sadness. And this evening, all at once, behind me, this same music sighs forth. Ah! it is such a calling up of the past, that I feel this time more keenly than ever the shudder of awakening and of regret which runs through my marrow. . . . Thus here am I still here, seated quietly in the old accustomed place; all around me in Stamboul things have remained the same, while our beloved retreat at Eyoub no longer exists; Aziyadé's house is fallen in ruins; Achmet is dead; and for seven years Aziyadé has lain in the earth, and everything is swept and garnished

for eternity. . . . That phrase of Achmet's sister comes back to me all at once with more terrible meaning, as though the violin were singing it behind me in unknown notes of unheard sadness: "It was in the end of spring, . . . and they carried her away in the evening." . . .

They carried her away in the evening. . . . I seem to see that twilight evening of May or June, very calm, very serene, as though in careless irony shedding a pink glow over the gloomy house; and then the door opening without noise to let the bearers come forth, carrying something heavy. . . . Oh, that body carried away thus, her body! . . . No, never before have I felt for her anything comparable to what I suffer now. . . .

Besides, since the commencement of

my pilgrimage to Constantinople, in spite of the difficulties with which my path has been strewn, in spite of the changes, the destruction, and death—in spite, too, of those intervals of forgetfulness which confound me—I seem to be drawing nearer and nearer to the dear phantom I pursue, and our souls seem almost to be reunited. . . . I have turned my head towards the street and the darkness, because my eyes are suddenly suffused with tears and can no longer distinguish anything. Bitter tears, tears of abandonment like those she must have shed, roll down my cheeks.

The little boy who brings me my coffee and my narghileh sees that I have been weeping, and stares at me in astonishment, then, doubtless thinking to himself that this stranger's affairs

are nothing to him, he retires, without speaking. The old musician of death is alone, hardly to be seen, playing on as in a dream. I remain, prolonging as much as possible this time of suffering, because never in all those ten years have I felt so near to her as here in the solitude of this darkened street, while behind me, in the midst of the silence and the night, trembles the tender music of the violin. . . .

An hour later, having reached the other bank, and ascended to Pera, I dismiss my runner and the horse at the door of the hotel. Then, changing my mind, instead of going in, I set out again alone on foot to wander about at random, perhaps until the morning; I prefer not to waste in

sleep the time, all too short, that remains to me here.

At first I feel a kind of intoxication — unexpected, too complete — at being alone, free, without object, in the dark streets. The night keeps warm, like a night in June, and the air is laden with the scents of Constantinople, in which, in these quarters, the balsamic perfume of the cypress woods prevails.

For three summer months before going to live at Hadjikeuï and at Eyoub, I lived here on the height of Pera, overlooking from my window the marvellous panorama of distant Stamboul. That was the time when I was looking for the arrival of Azi-yadé, without altogether believing that she would come, and while waiting, I sought distraction with others. It was

also the transitory period of my life, when, all at once, having no faith or hope, I gave myself up to headlong passion. And the new enchantment of this Eastern life, the splendour of the summer, challenges from so many dark eyes, all gave to those three months of waiting something strangely voluptuous, with underlying depths of sadness. Ah! those nights passed in wandering through the streets, as I am doing this evening, but then always in pursuit of some new adventure, now the memory of them comes back to me at every turn, at sight of everything I can recognise in the darkness! And these scents, too, which have not changed! And all the noises which so quickly become familiar to me again; the distant barking of stray dogs, the signals of the watch, who strike the

pavement, making it ring with the end of their iron-tipped staves, and the confused din coming up from below, from the dissolute quarters of Galata.

I now descend the steps of a street, which only has houses on one side of it, and which on the other overlooks a deep ditch—the Field of the Dead, with beyond it the pale line of the sea, and a fantastic outline, which is Stamboul.

I seem to recognise these pavements, these steps, in a curiously vivid manner.

In fact, how was it that I did not perceive before that this is the very street I used to live in; and there is my Pera house, and up there are the windows of my room. How many times I have returned to this place in the small hours, when the cool, pink

flush of dawn was already beginning to rise on the Asiatic shore! Little by little clearer memories of past joys return in spite of me, and disturb me further. . . .

I reach the Little-Field-of-the-Dead, surrounded by walls; a sweet-smelling cyprus wood, and here are Moham-medan tombs so ancient that they no longer inspire horror. I often used to come here in the middle of the night, and sit upon the dry moss, covered with pungent needles from the trees overhead. It was a safe place for a rendezvous without witnesses. The entrance to it was over there by that grated iron gateway, just coming into view. It was always closed this gateway, but when you were accustomed to the place, as I was, by passing your hand through a certain part of the

wall, where the stone was worn away, you could reach the bolt and draw it back. . . . And almost unconsciously my hand finds this hole, pulls the bolt, and pushes; the gate opens once more, creaking slightly on its rusty hinges with a well-known sound that robs me of all power of thought. . . .

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My God, do I no longer remember what I came to Constantinople for? Have I forgotten? . . . So near the time of my visit to her tomb, and I could go through such a moment of agitation — of disquieting unconcern! Ah! that funereal phrase: "They carried her away in the evening," . . . how could I forget it, even for a moment? How can I be so much the plaything of my sensations as to be able to think of other things? . .

In entering, I bow my head ; it seems to me that I have insulted the beloved memory during my strange nocturnal wanderings, and that I have driven away the loved phantom which, little by little, was drawing near to me.

And when at last I am alone in the darkness of my hotel room, sleep does not come to me, but my tears flow—the tears which purify, and which I bless.





CHAPTER IV.

Friday, October 7, 188—.



AWAKE out of my confused dreams, and dress with an anxious mind, to go to the cemetery.

In my trunks I have brought back with me one of those thickly embroidered Turkish costumes which are worn here on festival days—a poor relic, somewhat faded since our time at Eyoub. I used to wear it in the evening in our house, and in the Quarter. Aziyadé made me swear that I would return in this costume, that she might see it again, and for years I have promised myself that I

would bring it back, even if it were only to wear at her tomb in the cemetery.

But when I have put it on, I hesitate. This Oriental garment, which was familiar to me at that time, gives me now the feeling of a disguise—a wretched masquerade; and yet I want to keep it on. What shall I do? First I cover it up with an ordinary overcoat of neutral colour; then I replace that by a travelling cloak, which is longer, and envelops me down to my gold-coloured leggings. . . . All these details about dress seem very childish when it is a question of a pilgrimage to a tomb, the thought of which is stirring you to the depths of your soul! Below, a big landau is waiting, which I ordered last night, so that the two old women

might drive with me; and I set out in the glorious, bright sunshine.

We have to make a long detour, and drive through dangerously steep streets to get the carriage to this place, Hadji-Ali, where they have given me the rendezvous, Kassim-Pacha being a suburb on a declivity separated from Pera by the moat of the Field-of-the-Dead.

However, we reach it at last, for here is the little old white mosque and its black cypresses.

In the Hadji-Ali square I perceive two women awaiting me, only two, Anaktar-Chiraz and Achmet's sister. The third, Kadidji, the most wished for, the most essential, why is she not here?

The other two, on seeing me appear, make a despairing gesture.

Great heaven! what can have happened, has she refused to see me, or is she dead too? Then all would be at an end; I should have been shipwrecked in port, and for ever, and there would be no one left who could pilot me. . . . I have just time to say all this to myself in the few seconds of breathless anxiety, while I spring to the ground and run to question them.

No, they tell me it is nothing so serious as that. But the poor old woman is infirm, confined to her bed since last winter, unable to move a step. And no carriage could reach the quarter in which she lives, the roads are so steep and narrow.

Besides, what would be the use of her coming to this side of the Golden Horn, when, as she says,

the tomb is on the other shore, on the Stamboul side, but very far away, beyond the walls, in the country. . . .

So they buried her outside the walls of Stamboul! . . . Oh! how the very thought of it wrings my heart! . . .

And I instantly conjure up in my mind that desolate place, great wastes and cypress woods which extend to the foot of the mighty old ramparts from Phanar to the Seven Towers; an immense funereal desert about ten kilometres in length, and here the unknown dead are buried at random. And that is where they have put her! I have sometimes been afraid of it, without, however, letting my thoughts dwell upon it; no, rather would I picture to my-

self that she lay asleep in one of those beautiful cemeteries of Scutari, or on the banks of the Bosphorus. And how am I to find her beloved tomb there, if Kadidja, who is the only one who knew her, and who, it seems, has not long to live, if she cannot come to-day, at no matter what cost, to point it out to me.

Once again I undergo the agony of feeling the clue escaping from my hand, the agony of striving, always with the same feverish haste, after some expedient and finding none. . . .

At last I have an idea, and I call the Greek coachman who has driven me. Our parley on this spot, the stranger, the carriage, all this is very surprising to the inhabitants of the silent quarter, and several

pairs of eyes begin to look out from behind the grated windows. I have just remembered that ten years ago sedan-chairs were still in use at Pera; at that time, on rainy nights, I used to see actresses and singers being carried back to their hotels in them. This driver of mine, who looks intelligent, will perhaps be able to procure one for me at once, and bring it back to me here with a relay of bearers. . . .

I give him a piece of gold on account, and promise him another for his trouble, if, in half-an-hour, he has arranged all this for me. And he departs with a confident air, whipping up his horses.

Yet another of those uncertain waits which so often broke into my day yesterday. I seat myself on a stone

beside the two women and take off my grey mantle, which here looks stranger than my Oriental dress; and the embroideries on it, which were chosen by Aziyadé after so many years shine out in all their old brilliancy beside the shroud-like whiteness of the same old white-washed walls. And there, in the little white, sunny, solitary street, I feel a melancholy happiness at having for the moment again resumed the appearance of one of the people of the country. . . .

Thirty or forty minutes pass in silent waiting. The two black-robed women sit on either side of me, each with her head in her hands—like thoughts of death which have taken human form.

And at last, up above, on the summit of a hill which overlooks this

part of Hadji-Ali, the landau, returning at walking pace, appears outlined against the sky, followed by the sedan-chair and its bearers!

Let us make haste, haste! Let the carriage await me here with Anaktar-Chiraz one hour, two, as long as need be, and let Achmet's sister, the sedan-chair and its bearers go with me to the Golden Horn where we will hire a big skiff to take us over to Stamboul.

At Stamboul we land at gloomy Phanar, at the landing stage nearest to the quarter in which Kadidja lives; then we climb up through streets built in steps, between ruined and crumbling walls, and are much stared at by the few passers-by, who turn to look at us with uneasy hostile looks.

In a dark loft, in a nameless hovel, Kadidja lies extended upon foul rags, moaning feebly like a poor sick animal. But it is indeed she, and I do not think that any face or anything that I have seen this time at Constantinople has impressed me as the sight of this old black face does, in which there appears the malicious look of a dying monkey, and at the same time a supplicating tenderness; a strange combination of the decaying body, and the faithful beautiful soul which is passing away. . . .

In coming here I had been afraid of her reproaches and her anger, but the explosion of all that took place last night, when Achmet's sister spoke my name to her; she pardoned me afterwards because I have returned. I do not hear that terrible "Eulû!

Eulû!" or the curse of which I had a cruel presentiment ten years ago when I wrote the final chapter of *Aziyadé*. On the contrary, she holds out to me her poor black hands, shrivelled, contorted, frightful; and in spite of all that has passed, we look into each other's eyes and understand; she weeps, and in looking at her I find that my own eyes fill with tears. She is the very last of all, a negress, slave from birth, there she lies at present hardly human, dying in misery upon a dung-heap, and I bend over her filled with tender pity, and believe it would not cost me much effort to kiss her reverently.

Certainly, she says, she will rise in spite of her sufferings, and will allow herself to be taken by us, will do everything that I wish, at the risk of

dying of the effort this evening. She is happy beyond all that she could have asked from Heaven, happy in the part she is to play between her mistress and me, happy in this last unhopèd for visit which she is going to make to her tomb. And the tears continue to flow down her dusky cheeks, tears of joy which transfigure her. . . .

But here an unlooked for difficulty arises; the bearers in disgust refuse to touch her! Take her up in their arms, seat her in their chair, newly lined with velvet, no, never! They are elegant porters, with embroidered dresses, who did not at all expect to be disturbed for such work as this, and they refuse to do it.

I reflect that the poor old woman,

almost naked as she is, would, besides, be chilled to death if we removed her from the unclean rags which are piled upon her body, . . . and I remember to have seen, as we came along, in front of a little Jewish shop, some handsome orange - coloured woollen coverlids, one of which I beg Achmet's sister to go and buy. . . . I will lend a helping hand, and we two will wrap Kadidja in it, so that the bearers can lift her without fear.

Another quarter of an hour is lost over this toilette, which is almost like a laying out. At last the old woman, enveloped and rolled up in the thick new woollen stuff, is seated in the velvet-lined sedan-chair, smiling, in spite of her suffering and grief, at all this luxury, unknown to her in her life before. And we set out, taking

leave of Achmet's sister with hand-shakings and thanks.

As we start, Kadidja, who has become quite animated, gives her orders in a clear voice, and points out by which gate we are to leave Stamboul. The morning is advancing, I hire a horse on the way, and order the bearers to run. Some children, seeing the sedan-chair escorted by a cavalier, whose dress glitters like the cava of a pacha, dashing along, gaze in through the little glass windows to try to catch a glimpse of the beauty who is being carried away so quickly, and are frightened at sight of the black ape-like face.

All these agitations and cares have made me lose sight of the object of our journey. And there is, too, the physical pleasure of finding myself upon

a good horse which chance has thrown in my way, the pleasure of moving through the crisp pure air on a beautiful sunshiny morning. . . . And once more comes forgetfulness; I trot along almost light-heartedly, taking an interest in the strange, stately sadness of the things about me.

For some distance our way lies through the midst of those quarters, almost uninhabited and in ruins, called "Old Stamboul." At last we reach the gigantic crenellated wall which encircles it, we pass out through antique pointed gates which succeed one another like dark vaults, and here we are in the country, in the desert of tombs. Behind us the ramparts, which we have just passed, look like the walls of some huge abandoned town; incredibly high, bristling with sharp

points, and flanked by enormous towers, they extend to the right and left of us always the same, and are lost sight of in the distant wastes.

Before us lies the interminable stretch of graves; a dull grey waste, with here and there clumps of black cypress trees, which rise into the air like the spires of a church. A host of graves covers the ground, and the head-stones are of every age, and every historic period. A barren spot full of dead bones.

At the time when I was at Eyoub I very seldom came here. Once, however, we walked here, she and I, in broad daylight, one December afternoon, choosing this place because it was the most deserted. And quite near here, I remember, from the branches of one of those cypresses, a

little bird, who must have mistaken the season, sang to us, for us alone, a song of spring, Then a little further along, over there, we saw them bury such a lovely little child—there can be nothing left of her but dust to-day. . . . Ah! that walk upon the short grass, covered with winter daisies, the only one we ever had together in the light of day, with what a heart-break I remember it all at once.

And now the full consciousness of all that is so terribly sad in our journey comes over me. The thought that I am drawing near to her, to the remains of what was once her body, sends an icy chill through my veins, and I feel the return of that physical feeling which belongs to our hours of mourning, the feeling that

one's temples and one's breast are compressed little by little, more and more between iron bands.

I gaze at the tombs around me, those near and those at a distance, seeking out and questioning with my eyes, the least aged amongst them, those which have remained a little white, and upon which some gold glistens, those which have not yet taken on the uniform dull grey of the whole of this immense sepulchre. . . . For years I have foreseen and imagined this funereal pilgrimage, all that is actually realised to-day ; but I never thought that it would take place in this region of desolation ; no, I never thought that I should have to come and seek her amongst this confused mass of dead people ; I should in truth suffer less if only she

were anywhere but here, lost in the midst of so many others who have no longer even a name, or a head-stone to mark their graves. . . .

Kadidja has directed her bearers to the left, and we pass along by the overwhelming interminable crenellated wall in the direction of the Seven Towers, over bare ground, which looks as though it had a curse upon it.

We must be drawing near, for she taps with her old black hand upon the window of the sedan-chair as a sign to us to go slowly, and I see that she is looking with dilated eyes, seeking. . . . Even she seems to hesitate now—and I tremble. Ah! she must have seen it, for she signs to her bearers to stop. Here, to the right, upon a sort of hillock where there are half a score of upright

stones; it is there! Amongst the number there are three or four graves of women which I distinguish at a glance; stones painted blue or green with inscriptions and crowned at the top with strange-looking flowers, once gilded. . . . Which is hers?

She has been helped out of her chair, the poor trembling old woman, with her eager looks, and is supported by the two bearers, who hold her enveloped in her orange-coloured rug—not out of regard for her, simply in disgust at the idea of touching her—she tries to walk, poor infirm creature, and has disengaged from the folds of the rug two terrible mummy-like arms in which the swollen veins stand out, and by sheer force of will she succeeds in walking between the two men who support her, advancing

by jerks which hurt her. And I follow her full of an infinite pity. . . .

Which of these tombs? . . . Ah, that is it without doubt, the one towards which she seems to be directing her steps, the one of a faint blue colour with an inscription in gold still bright. . . . Yes, that must be it! . . . She throws herself upon it, clinging to it convulsively with her two hands; poor old creature, she is terrible to look upon, and fills one with fear; then she turns and cries out to me in a defiant, wild, sharp voice startling in the silence: "Bourda! . . . Bourda, Aziyadé!" (Here, here is Aziyadé.) There is that also in her cry which I understand well, and which pierces my heart like a knife: "And it is you who brought her here!" Then suddenly she takes my

hands, and in a changed voice, the voice of a little child, very gentle, as though to ask my pardon, she repeats: "Here! . . . here lies Aziyadé. Do you see, this is where she is now. . . ." At the same time her black face is distorted in a heartrending manner, and a flood of tears flows from her eyes. . . .

I bow my head, but not a tear comes to relieve me. Mechanically I raise my hand to my head to uncover, as we do before a Christian grave, then I drop it again. . . . I had forgotten the costume that I put on to come here: the Turkish fez is never removed, not even to pray to God. And I bend over the marble, trying to make out among the rusty inscriptions, which I do not know how to decipher, her name, the real,

the loved one, which is engraved on the rough gold ring she gave me, and written upon my breast in small blue letters that will never fade. But how comes it that I have again all at once become so calm, almost absent-minded? I seem no longer to be able to understand, my mind is a blank. What is it that has closed my heart in such an unexpected manner? It must be the presence of the bearers, with their inquisitive looks and almost ironical surprise, the somewhat theatrical look of the whole group. Ah, I should have come alone. They ought not to be here, their looks, their mere vicinity are an insult to the beloved tomb; and if they suspected all, later, when I am far away, there might even be danger for the peace of this spot.

I will return alone to-morrow morn-

ing. There will still be time, as the steamer by which I am going does not leave till three o'clock in the afternoon. And that will be my real visit; for to-day let us go, for the presence of these men who walk about and talk is profanation. . . .

To her who sleeps beneath this stone, I say within myself: "I will come alone, my poor little love, to see you. I will devote to-morrow to you in your desert. You already know that I love you, seeing that to find you I have come all this long distance. . . ." And yet I linger in spite of myself, gazing stealthily at the earth under the marble headstone. . . . But no, to-day I will not think of what is beneath it. I turn away my head, and by force of hardening myself I feel that my

expression has again become stern and impassive.

But I take note of my surroundings with extreme care, so as not to lose my way when I come alone. First of all, in that formidable gloomy wall, which looks as if it shut out the world behind us, I count how many square bastions there are from here to the gateway at which we shall pass out, then I hastily trace in my note-book a few lines and the position of some cypress trees, so as to be sure of all my landmarks; I engrave upon my memory for ever the whole of this funereal spot, so that I shall not forget the way, even if I did not return for ten or twenty years. I try too to find some small plants which I might pluck to-morrow and take away with me; alas! there is hardly anything!

so barren is the soil; just two or three hardly perceptible prickly leaves, and a frail-looking grey lichen. I do not even know whether in the spring-time the smallest moor flower blossoms on her grave. . . .

And now let us go quickly. The bearers help the poor exhausted old woman back into the sedan-chair. I remount my horse, and we retrace our steps through this solitude, quickly as we came.

Very strange, truly, and very unexpected to me this short cold visit. I go away more bitterly sad, discontented, and unappeased than ever. Supposing that something should prevent me from coming back to-morrow, that between now and then some thunderbolt should strike me. . . . Up to the last moment, until we reach

the fierce-looking gates of the great wall, I hesitate, and look behind me, tempted to put my horse to the gallop and return upon my steps. . . .

When we have laid Kadidja among her rags again in her gloomy loft, I dismiss the bearers, whose presence is odious to me. As well as I can, I arrange over the poor old woman her new rug which gives her so much pleasure, and which she strokes with her hands like a little child with a new toy.

And now I wish to question her, she who is the only person in the world to whom I can talk, the only one among those who have seen, who have known, and who have preserved in their memory all that I tremble to know.

"Yes, yes," she replies, "I will tell you things, many things. . . . One of these days you will come and talk to your Kadidja, after she has had a good sleep to rest her head. . . ."

One of these days! . . . But I have only this one day! . . .

"Ah! Loti," she continues, raising herself with an effort, "you do not know; they drove me away—me . . . But her Kadidja did not go far, as you may believe, and for two nights, when I understood that she was dying, I stayed in the street, lying at her door to listen. . . ."

They drove her away. . . . Then, what can she tell me? What confused and strange information shall I be able to draw from her poor wits, which, besides, seem to me to be wandering.

“And, Fenzilé-hanum,” I reply, “do you know what has become of her?”

“Ah! Fenzilé, yes. . . . Ah! she knows many things; perhaps, perhaps it would be a good thing for her to come here and speak to you!”

This Fenzilé, one of old Abeddin’s three other wives, I saw only once, and, of course, veiled, but I know that she was kinder to Aziyadé than her companions, almost helpful and good to her. And it appears that she is the only one of all that scattered harem who remained at Constantinople, where she has married again. Oh, if there were any means of speaking to her! It is true, I dare not hope that it will be possible. . . .

“What shall we do, my good Kadidja, to induce her to come here to you?”

A moment later, directed by the

negress, I have been to a neighbouring hovel to find and bring back with me a very old woman, with the sinister face of a go-between, who, in her day, must have had a hand in more than one equivocal adventure. It is upon this person that Kadidja relies to negotiate the interview ; full of agitation now, she gives her, on this subject, her instructions, which seem to be very precise, and I promise her a large reward. The rendezvous is to be here, and for this afternoon of course, towards seven o'clock, Turkish time. But I count very little upon it. . . .

I am anxious to question Kadidja further, but she is more and more exhausted, and I refrain. I myself am terribly worn out with this morning ; above all, I divine only too well what she will tell me in clearer terms

if I press her,—that is, that Aziyadé died of my desertion. As that is true, it is my duty to hear it, and I will do so, but that will be enough for one time, when I return this evening. . . . Then I remember that they are waiting for me on the other side of the water, and in rather a cowardly manner I escape. . . .

And now I must return to the Golden Horn, take a skiff across to the other side, go to the Hadji-Ali square, where Anaktar-Chiraz and the carriage are awaiting me, and go to visit another tomb.

Seated beside me, Anaktar-Chiraz has said to the driver, "Go to the Armenian-Catholic Cemetery of Chichli."

It is a long way off, it appears, and he whips up his horses, who start off

at a rapid pace. Turning our backs on Stamboul, we once more reach Pera, which we pass through at utmost speed, and, after going through Taxim, find ourselves in another suburb, very different from the one in which Azi-jadé lies buried. . . . What a long way they have put them from one another, my poor little companions of Eyoub.

In a Catholic cemetery? . . . Yes, now I remember, he told me he was born Armenian-Catholic, and that later, towards his fifteenth year, he had become Mussulman, under the name of Achmet. In his last hours he must have turned again to Christ.

What a horrible suburb this is, compared to Stamboul, in the melancholy of which there is something grand and superb. . . . This is the place where

all the cosmopolitans of Pera come to amuse themselves on *fête* days ; in a locality without trees, without verdure, absolutely bare, with its odious roadside public-houses—Armenian, Greek, Jewish—which recall the low environs of Paris. Then begin the ploughed fields, through which our carriage plunges, an absolutely grey earth-coloured region, without a single green herb ; at last, on a lonely height, a four-walled enclosure appears, grey also, above which not a cypress tree or any sort of foliage is visible ; that is the cemetery of Chichli.

We enter. One would think it was a cemetery for the poor, for criminals. There is not a flower or a plant anywhere. Just a few little wooden or stone crosses, a few marble slabs ; but, for the most part, simple mounds of

earth mark the resting-places of the bodies.

The old Armenian woman looks about her, chooses one of the paths, and begins to count the sinister-looking mounds—one, two, three, four—and stops at one place which seems to have been recently dug up: "There lies our Achmet!" she says, and her honest, motherly eyes become dim at the remembrance of the child whom she tended like one of her own sons.

Oh, my poor friend! how sad is this place of his burial. . . .

As I shall not be able to return here a second time, I shall take my last farewell of him now: "Which way does his head lie?" "Here," replies the old woman, stooping to touch with the tips of her fingers the clods of earth. And, from the place which she points

out to me, I pluck to carry away, a poor little clover leaf which has sprung up there by itself.

I tell the driver to take us back at full speed to the hotel.

Anaktar-Chiraz is seated beside me in the landau, and, on the way, I beg her, after my departure, to take charge of the marble slab which I shall have placed over Achmet's grave in the cemetery. For one of his great troubles was, I remember, the thought that if he died before he had made a little money, there would perhaps be no stone to mark his grave.

It is only just mid-day when we reach the hotel, all my long perigrinations of the morning have but lasted four hours.

I invite the Armenian to come in, and the waiters, little used to seeing

their guests with such companions, stare at her, but without impertinence, so honest and dignified is her appearance in her mourning dress.

Having taken from her pocket a large pair of spectacles, she seats herself at a writing-table, ready to write down all the instructions. I shall leave her about the tomb. . . .

But we are interrupted by the Jew Salomon whom a servant shows in. He comes to tell me that he has done his best to find Achmet, but that no one knows anything about him.

Ah! I can well believe that Achmet is not to be found! . . . And since yesterday, since the hour when I sent Salomon to make inquiries, what a lot of ground I have travelled over, in the region of gloomy certainty, and the hush of

death. At that moment everything was still a matter of sorrowful uncertainty, now it seems as though over all those things which agitated me yesterday a heavy rain of ashes has fallen. . . .

Anaktar-Chiraz has written down in Armenian characters for herself what I have begged her to do about the marble stone.

And now our business together is ended, and it only remains to say good-bye.

She rises to go, and looks at me with the same kind motherly expression which I saw in her eyes just now at Chichli. In thanking me for what I am going to do for poor dead Achmet, the big tears drop from her eyes, and I too am overcome for a moment.

Then she begs permission to embrace me before she goes—Ah! indeed gladly. . . . And with all my heart, for Achmet's sake, I return her kiss upon her poor old wrinkled cheek.

At eight o'clock, Turkish time (about three in the afternoon), I go to the rendezvous at Kadidja's.

Near her pallet, with its orange covering, upon which her poor frightful hands move restlessly, sits alone the evil-looking woman whom I saw this morning. Fenzilé-hanum is not here; I was afraid it would be so. "She is away," she tells me; "they do not know where she has gone, or for how long either. . . ." And I see at once, by her stubbornly evasive replies, and her cold hard

expression, that it is useless to insist; this Fenzilé who will not see me, must have frightened her with some unknown menaces, or have paid her to say nothing. . . .

When she is gone, after demanding payment for her journey, I seat myself upon a stool beside Kadidja's pillow.

And now begins for me the cruelest hour of my whole pilgrimage, the hour of punishment and expiation. . . .

In a conversation interrupted with cries and silences, to force myself to this knowledge, and hardly able to attain to it. From this aged dying brain, sometimes in a state of collapse, sometimes in wild delirium, to draw by little incoherent scraps the information which freezes, which burns me. To be stopped every minute with pity at seeing her so exhausted, with re-

morse at having perhaps killed her by forcing her to take that long journey this morning. To have between us what adds still more to the dark cloud, the difficulties of a language which we neither of us possess perfectly. And yet to have to tell myself that I must take advantage at all costs of this passing moment, because I leave to-morrow, and because she is dying; she is the sole still living connecting link between my love and me; when she has been put into the earth, every bond will be broken for ever; whatever to-day even I shall be unable to draw forth from this almost obliterated memory will be lost for ever. . . .

As to the date, Kadidja agrees with Achmet's sister, that it must be seven years in the spring since Aziyadé died. . . . And the cause of her

death . . . it is understood between us ; with a delicacy which I did not expect, she avoids telling me ; and she stops me with a look of astonishment and sorrowful reproach when I seem to insist upon knowing. In spite of alternations of senile childishness, she has kept a strange amount of intelligence, and, poor old slave as she is, has always had an excellent heart. I have more and more respect for her—and above all, of pity for the deadly fatigue I am causing her. . . .

“And so you say, good Kadidja, that she kept up hope for more than a year ?” What did she hope for, poor child ? Some imaginary return, with perhaps an elopement, one of those dangerous adventures which now, with money and independence, I might attempt but which then was so impossible !

And it was only at the end of that time that she began visibly to decline, to lose her healthy youthful colour, and to hang her head, believing herself to be forgotten, and her soul lost forever. But my letters, did not my letters reach her any more? . . .

"Oh! your letters," replies Kadidja, "I gave her . . . wait a moment . . . I gave her six of them. . . ."

"And why not the others?"

"The others," she says, . . . "in the fire! I threw then into the fire! For as they had driven me away, you see I could no longer carry them to her, and I was afraid to keep them." . . . From her manner of pronouncing the words, "in the fire!" I understand that she looked upon them in the end, my letters, as lying things

and bewitched, an indirect cause of misfortune.

As to Aziyadé's letters, Kadidja is certain she sent me four, but not one more. And that is just what I thought; the four first, those which were so like her, which contained her dear little thoughts, so exquisite with their amusing turns of shy childish thought. The others which followed then, the common-place, improbable letters, like the last from Achmet, from whom did they come? What disquieting hand wrote them to me, and for what purpose? That will always remain a mystery, and after all, what does it matter *now that all is at an end*. . . .

It was certainly our own imprudence in those last days which all at once opened old Abeddin's eyes to our long

unpunished intrigue. Then came the accusations of the other women of the harem, who were interrogated, and who, by menaces or promises, were made to speak. Aziyadé was not, however, turned out of her husband's house, or ill-treated; she was simply set aside as something impure—banished and shut up in the silence of her apartment, where nobody entered except unfriendly servants. At the end of a year, Kadidja herself had the door of the gloomy house closed upon her, as she was suspected of having some relations with the public writer, and with the French post-office at Pera. And it was then, with the loss of all hope, that the slow agony really began.

I do not believe that a very young creature, with warm fresh blood, which

no contagion has ever touched, can die of despair alone, if it is given sun, air, and liberty. . . . But cloistered and abandoned as she was! . . .

“You know,” says Kadidja, “that her room looked out towards the stars” (the north), “and that it was very cold.”

Yes; I remember those windows, with their thick grating, situated in a wing of the house which the sun never reached. I used to look at them stealthily as I passed through that street full of mystery, where only the red rays of the setting sun, without heat, ever penetrated. And I picture to myself vividly what that room—since destroyed by fire—must have been, where Death, with slow steps, came to find her. . . .

Kadidja continues,—

"Shut up there all the winter, she became ill from the effects of the cold room. . . . Then the other ladies gave her remedies. . . . Ah! Loti, that is, above all what I wished to say to you: they gave her remedies . . . which I mistrusted entirely!" . . .

Great God! where was I while all this was taking place in that obscure harem? . . . She might so easily have been saved, with a little joy, a little sunshine, by taking her away from that place! . . . In what corner of the world was I wandering about, able to do nothing, knowing nothing, while the soul of my beloved was passing away in sorrow, and her adored form slowly perishing, until that May evening when "they carried her away almost stealthily." . . .

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Yet a few more details, for which I ask, and which are given to me with great difficulty, amid child-like moanings and cries; for Kadidja wanders more and more, and becomes more and more exhausted. And I, too, am exhausted by the terribly painful things I hear, and by the tension of mind needful to draw them forth, one by one, from the brain of this poor old creature, almost dead.

Between the terror of further questioning, and the desire to know more, I hesitate; I am ready to finish it at any moment—and yet I linger, remembering that this interview is final; it is the last time that I shall speak of her with a living soul. . . .

Meanwhile, I think that her torture has lasted long enough — and mine too; and besides, I have learnt

about all that I wished to find out. I will go. . . .

"It is getting late, you are going to return to Pera now, are you not?" Kadidja asks me in a coaxing, persuasive voice; she is once again the negress, with the cunning little manners of a child, impatient for the end of the interview, that she may be left in peace.

I give her some gold pieces, with which she is dazzled, and which will assure to her some comfort in these her last days. And then I take a final leave of her, carrying away with me her pardon, and a tender benediction.

She will die before long, that is certain; her eyes, which, after mine, were the only ones to look with affection upon Aziyadé, will soon be ex-

tinguished and dead ; that picture of Aziyadé, which is still present to her dying mind, will soon exist no more. . . . When we die, it is only the commencement of a series of other partial annihilations, plunging us ever deeper into the darkness of everlasting night. Those who love us die too. All the human minds, in which our image was to some extent preserved, become disintegrated and return to dust ; all that belonged to us is dispersed and crumbles away ; our portraits, which are no longer recognised, are effaced, our name is forgotten, and our generation passes away. . . .

I walk slowly through the miserable, little deserted street.

A few steps further on, I remount my horse, which a child is walking round a solitary square.

It is too late to visit her tomb to-night; I shall spend my morning there to-morrow. . . .

And once more I wander about aimlessly until nightfall.

In the twilight I suddenly find myself back again in the great Mehmed-Fatih Square, returned quite by chance.

Then I recall that passage out of my earlier journal, which is most singularly engraved upon my memory, and which has by degrees become so associated in my mind with this holy spot, as if it told its whole story.

“The mosque of the Sultan Mehmed-Fatih sees us often, Achmet and I, seated before its great grey stone porticos, basking in the sunshine, without a care in life, pursuing some

dream untranslatable into any human language." . . .

There is nothing changed here ; it has remained one of the most Turkish looking, and melancholy places in Stamboul. The mosque rises in the midst of it, absolutely the same through the centuries, with its high grey porticos, ornamented with mysterious designs. And around it, under the yellow vines of the little *café*, are seated, in the last glimmer of the autumn evening, the same old Cashmere caftans, the same old white turbans, smoking their narghilehs as they discuss holy things.

I stop in the midst of them, at the same place where, ten years ago, we saw one evening on the steps of the mosque a visionary appear, who, raising his eyes and his hands to heaven,

cried aloud: "I see God, I see the Eternal!" Achmet shook his head incredulously, saying: "What man, Loti, could ever see Allah! . . ."

In truth, I know not how it is that my halt in this square has so deeply impressed itself among so many other memories of my pilgrimage, nor why I feel the need to hold on to it, to prevent it from disappearing too quickly in the general flight of everything—as one holds back for an instant some lightly-flowing object which is being carried away by the current. . .





CHAPTER V.

SATURDAY, *October 8, 188—.*

IT is the morning of my last day. A thick grey mist has descended upon Constantinople, recalling our northern autumns.

I have put on my Turkish dress again, as I did yesterday, that I may the more resemble what I was in the old days, and be more easily recognised in that region of death to which I am going, by the unknown and uncertain emanations of souls who may look out above the tombs. And, this time alone, I ride along by the great wall of Stamboul, utterly alone, under

the low dark sky, alone, as far as my eye can reach, in the midst of these wastes and funereal woods.

The wall lengthens out as I advance, and unfolds itself always with the same aspect into the distance of the lifeless country. It seems, with the thousand points of its battlements, to be holding up the heavy trailing clouds that are ready to fall upon the earth. In colour, it is sombre and sinister on this sunless morning. Colossal relic of the past, it diminishes and overwhelms us with our short lives and our sufferings for an hour, and all the unstable nothingness that we are. As I pass along, I note the deep-pointed gates, through which no one ever passes in or out; and then I count with care the enormous square towers,—until there appears before me the

kind of hillock pointed out to me yesterday, upon which amongst other tombs, is the little blue mound with its inscription in gold.

And when I have found it, the little mound where lies Aziyadé, I fasten my horse to the branches of a cypress tree, and alone I approach it and fling myself upon the earth—upon the reddish earth, damp with mist, where a few frail plants grow. From the position of the mound, I know how the beloved body beneath must lie, and having looked all around to make sure no one is there to see me, I lie down gently and kiss the earth above the place where the dead face must be.

For years I have had the presentiment, and, as it were, the vision by anticipation, of all that is taking place

this morning. Under a lowering, gloomy sky like this, I saw myself returning in this same dress to lie beside her grave, and kiss the earth above her. . . . And now the day has come, the day for this last kiss—and, somehow, it does not seem real to me; I find I am distracted even here by outside things, perhaps by the immensity of the funereal setting, by all the charm of desolation with which, to my irresponsible eyes, the scene of my visit to this tomb is surrounded and enlarged.

However, as the minutes pass in the awful silence, and while the heavy clouds continue to trail above the great Saracen walls, little by little I awake to a consciousness of things; my suffering is more simple, a more human, more sorrowful understanding

of it all comes to me, and once more my soul is shaken with a feeling of infinite sadness. . . .

Still the moments pass; a slight wind arises, sprinkling drops of pattering rain over this land of the dead.

Our long silent interview goes through different phases, which seem to draw us nearer and nearer to each other. I am wholly under the impression now that our bodies are once more almost re-united—after having been so long separated by the years, by distance, by journeys across the world, and by the inexplicable mystery in which her destiny was hidden from me. I feel that we are here, quite close to one another, separated only by a little of the earth in which they buried her without a coffin. And I love these remains tenderly—*they are everything to me at*

this moment; I long to see them, to touch them, to carry them away; nothing of what was once Aziyadé could cause me fear or horror. . . .

The grey clouds still drag along the sky with their darker fringe, and, as they pass, send down a shower of rain upon the mournful country and the immense wall. . . .

Aziyadé's image is before me now—almost living—brought back, without doubt, by the proximity of her grave, over which there must hover something that may be called an essence of herself. . . . Ah! she is alive all at once—so alive, that she has never seemed to me so real since the evening of our separation. I see again as always her smile, her earnest eyes fixed on mine, her look of those last days; I hear her voice, her little

familiar intonations, so confiding and childlike; I find once more all those familiar, indescribable little ways which were part of herself, and which I adored with an infinite devotion. And the great scene and strange surroundings no longer exist for me—only herself, Aziyadé. All my impressions change, soften, dissolve into something absolutely tender, and I weep hot tears, tears such as I have longed to shed. . . .

.

From this moment I delight in the fond illusion that she knows I have returned, and that she has understood everything. . . . The idea of a soul persistent and present, comes to me secretly, inexplicably, but *deeply felt*, and the bitterness and remorse attached to her memory, disappear without doubt for ever.

And I arise calmed, my sorrow quite changed. Even her destiny seems to me less gloomy than before; she died in the fulness of youth, having had but that one dream of love. And the kiss which I came to press upon her grave, I doubt if there will be anyone to do the like for mine.

At the foot of her marble headstone, amongst the little plants there, I choose one of the freshest, which I carry away with me; then, once more I kiss her name, cut in relief on the marble and covered with dull gold; and I remount my horse, turning from afar to look again upon her grave, in the midst of the solitude where the high wall of Stamboul stretches away further than the eye can reach. . . .



CHAPTER VI.

IN the evening, in the stern of the steamer which takes me away, I lean on my elbows and watch, as I did ten years ago, Constantinople disappearing from view. Then the twilight descends upon us like a huge veil flung over everything, and, at the outlet of the Bosphorus into the Black Sea, night overtakes us altogether.

And in my heart all grows calmer and calmer, grows less vivid, and retires into the dim, shadowy distance.



CHAPTER VII.

January, 1892.

IN my childhood I remember to have read the history of an apparition which came timidly every evening and beckoned people to follow it. It came back again and again for years, till the day when someone dared to follow it, understood what it wanted, and satisfied it.

Well! that agonising dream with which I was haunted for so many years, the dream of a return to Constantinople, always impeded, never coming to anything—that dream has never returned to me since I accomplished

my pilgrimage. And when I think of the East, my memories have all grown calm with the passing years. . . .

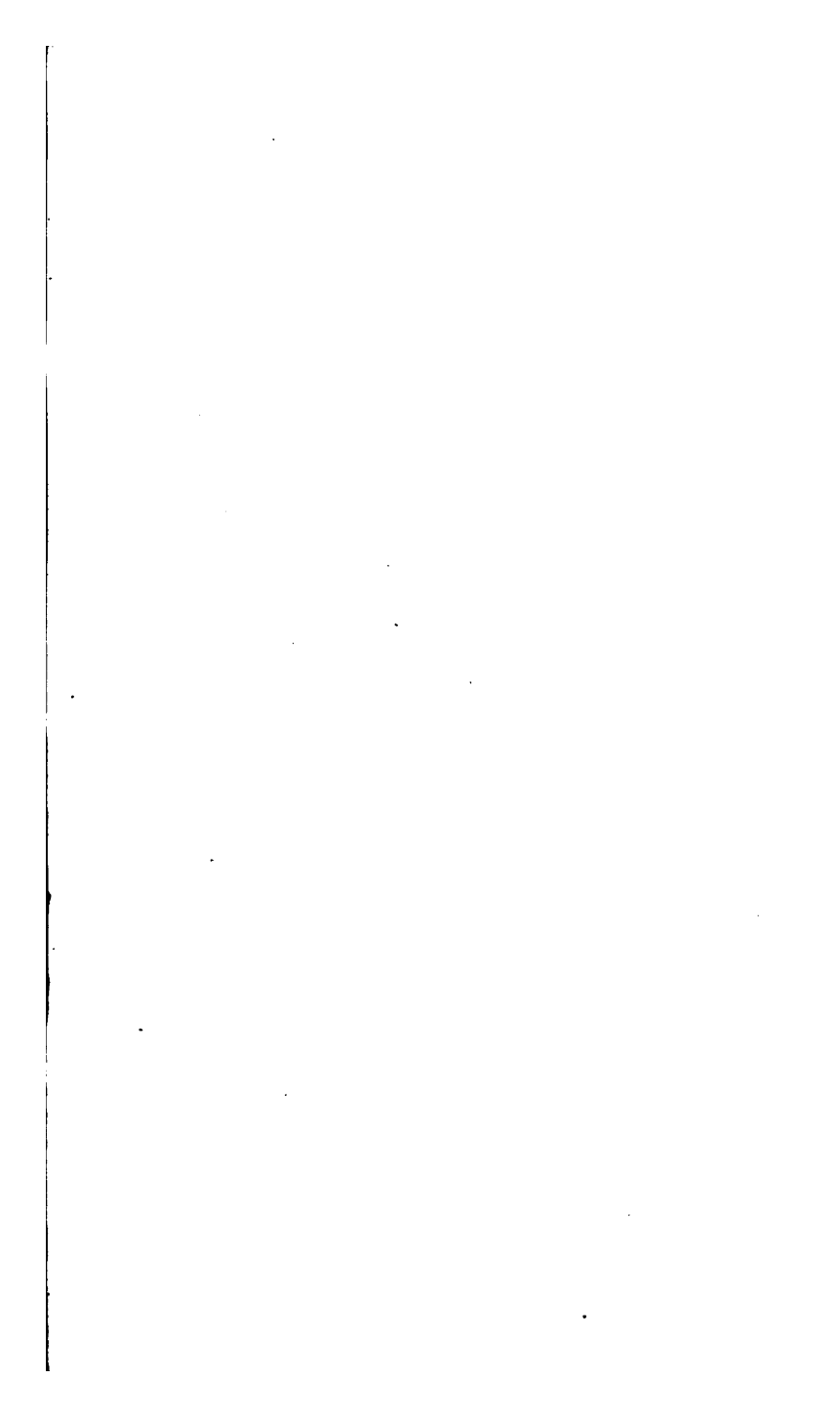
That dream must surely have been the summons of the beloved little phantom from yonder, which I obeyed, and which is not repeated.

THE END.

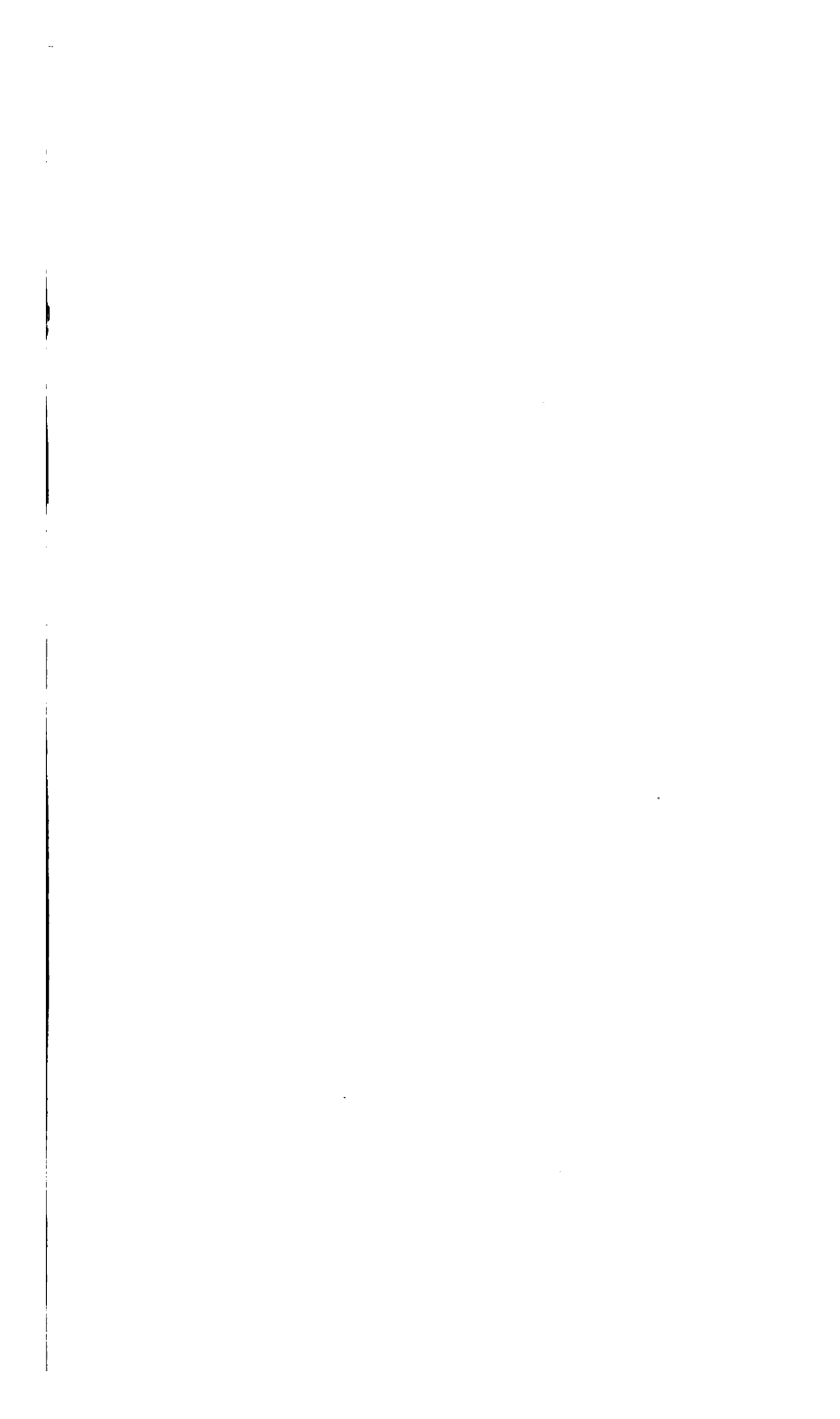
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